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WHY METAL VENUES ARE CLOSING
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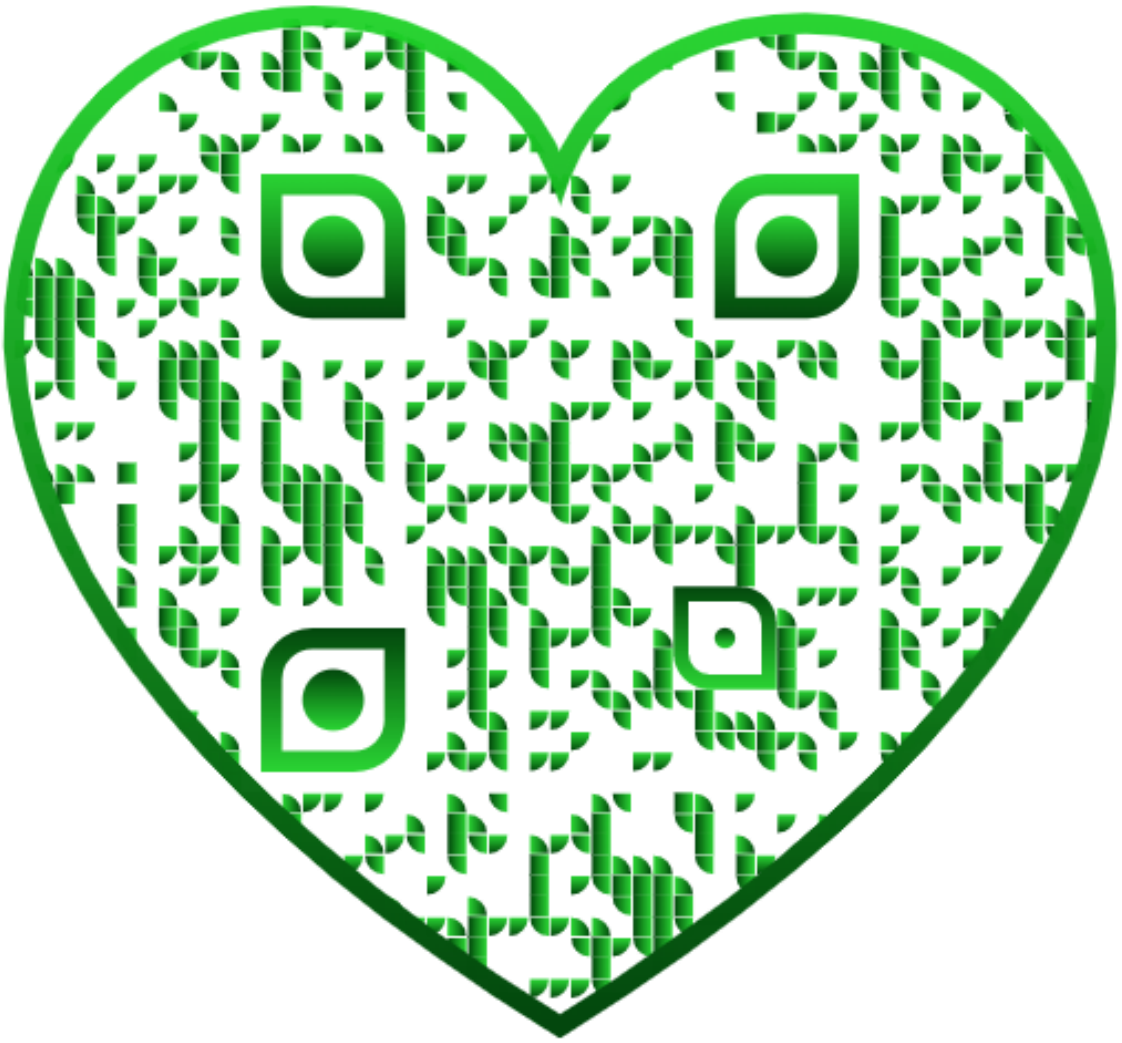
The secret heartbreak behind Reverence
PLUS
HOWARD JONES • SHIELDS
THE BODY • SEVEN SPIRES
AT THE GATES • PRIMAL RITE
FUTURE
ISSUE 309



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LUCIFER'S SONS

Hail Satan! Ghost have returned. But who's the new Papa? And who the hell is the Cardinal? Mainman Tobias Forge confesses all.

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MYSTERY ISN'T DEAD

In the social media age, it's rare to find a band with a little mystique. Over the last eight years, Ghost have grown from an underground oddity into the biggest cult metal band of the 21st century, all while keeping us guessing every step of the way. In a world-exclusive interview, we bring you the first look into their fascinating next chapter, courtesy of band mastermind Tobias Forge. *Prequelle* is shaping up to be one of 2018's most important albums, and as for Cardinal Copia... find out how he fits into proceedings on page 28.

Parkway Drive are also about to drop what could be a year-defining record, and in a startlingly emotional interview, frontman Winston McCall reveals why they've had to survive the darkest period of their career. We're lucky to have them.

Beyond that, we visit Jonathan Davis's home studio, celebrate the chilling return of Dimmu Borgir, take a peek into the new Bury Tomorrow album and begin a new, multi-part look into the story of thrash metal, through the eyes of the innovators who brought those game-changing riffs to the world. Enjoy.

KEEP IT HEAVY

EDITOR

38 **PARKWAY DRIVE**

The follow-up to *Ire* is even more brutal than we could have imagined. Winston explains how the quintet have been to hell and back.

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We head to Bakersfield to hang out with Jonathan Davis at his dark home studio, a world away from the glossiness and bright lights of LA.

50 **A PERFECT CIRCLE**

Back with a new record that holds a black mirror up to our society, Maynard James Keenan puts the world to rights.

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Why Satan's servants on Earth have got big into choirs... and what the hell they've been up to for the last eight years.

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Evanescence hit the Royal Festival Hall, Emperor, Satyricon and Electric Wizard blast Inferno festival, Carpenter Brut blaze brain cells, Sepultura celebrate 20 years with Derrick Green and more!

92 **COOL SHIT**
Dimmu Borgir box sets, smart speakers, Thanos mugs and Norse gods books prove some of our favourite blings this month.

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PARKWAY DESTROY CAMDEN

MARCH 16, 2018

TICKETS HAD ALREADY gone by the time most fans even knew the gig was happening: Parkway Drive, Australia's biggest 21st-century metal export, a band who headlined Brixton Academy twice on *Ire*, were playing the 500-capacity Underworld. No pyro. No props. Just one of the best live bands on planet Earth in a tiny room in the heart of Camden Town. Playing a set that leaned heavily on *Horizons* – which celebrated its 10th anniversary last year – the incendiary five-piece made the most of their surprise gig by also dropping new singles *Wishing Well* and *The Void*, alongside set staples like *Vice Grip, Wild Eyes* and a building-shaking *Bottom Feeder*. "It's hot up here!" grinned frontman Winston McCall, and he wasn't kidding – The Underworld was so boiling you could literally see steam rising from the pit. It was, quite possibly, the last chance we'll ever get to see Parkway in such intimate surroundings on these shores. We'll never forget it. ✠

JOHN McMURTRIE

HOWARD JONES

LIGHT THE TORCH

The former Killswitch frontman has rebranded and is ready to roar again

WORDS: ALI COOPER

SINCE HIS TENURE at the helm of Killswitch Engage ended in 2012, Howard Jones has looked adversity in the eye. Mental health lapses and severe anxiety led to a diagnosis of manic depression and bipolar disorder, followed by a spell in a mental health hospital and a suicide attempt. In forming his own project, Devil You Know, it appeared the frontman had found a new vessel to channel himself through. However, in July last year, the band changed their name to Light The Torch following a bitter legal dispute with a former member. Despite their misfortune, Howard and co secretly recorded their third album, *Revival*, and rediscovered their spark. The singer tells *Metal Hammer* why this album means so much to him, and what comes next.

DEVIL YOU KNOW BECAME LIGHT THE TORCH LAST YEAR. HOW COME?

"The name change was a very long legal process to do with member issues. Because of the way things ended with Devil You Know, it didn't feel good going on with that name, so instead of continuing our history, we dumped it and those albums are basically dead now. We're not moving away from them, we'll still play them live. To me, it's like when one gets married; they're still the same person but with a different name. The fact that we had to take that step says a lot about what we had to go through, too. We really went through the wringer, and that's why you heard almost nothing from us, the band was totally on hold. There's no need to point fingers but it just had to stop. In the end, we bonded more throughout the process, and here we are today."

SO YOU WENT AWAY AND QUIETLY RECORDED THE NEW ALBUM, *REVIVAL*. HOW DID YOU KEEP IT A SECRET FOR SO LONG?

"We had to take the control back. We were in limbo and it was horrible. There was no movement with the legal issues so there was nobody to check in and see what we were doing every day. Also, I don't talk to anybody and I don't have social media so I had nobody to tell. We spent a year and a half working on it, and about three hours before we finished all our recording, I got an email from Monte Conner at Nuclear Blast saying we had to stop! We were still working out our old contract and we had to start a new one. The album was a shock for them but luckily they were happy with us. Plus, we were too deep in what happened to us, so we concentrated on just writing a solid album."

"THE DEVIL YOU KNOW ALBUMS ARE BASICALLY DEAD NOW"

WHAT DOES THE NEW ALBUM MEAN TO YOU? IS IT A LINE DRAWN IN THE SAND?

"It feels so different to *They Bleed Red* back in 2015. I guarantee there's a lot of emotion in *Revival* because we went through so much turmoil. There's much more melody and harmony now; I wanted to sing the majority of it because the music was flowing in such a way that it could hold a lot of different melodies. It was really fun to write specifically for Ryan [Wombacher, bass] and hand the mic over to him, he's got a great voice. Then Mike Sciulara [Extinction AD] came in and nailed the album's drums with us, and Francesco [Artusato, guitars] worked on the artwork, so we've had a blast."

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE DEVIL YOU KNOW ERA NOW IT'S OVER?

"It's part of my past, and the albums are buried but they're still a vivid snapshot of what my life was like at that time and what I was going through. If I put a ton of energy into being upset and angry that it's over, so it solves nothing other than making me feel upset for longer. I had to let it go."

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW ALL YOUR WORK IS COMING TO LIGHT?

"Fantastic! I've been helping other bands write albums with Peter Wichers [ex-Soilwork], plus Light The Torch will be out on the road soon. I'm in a much better state of mind as long as I'm keeping myself occupied. I average three hours of sleep a night so I'm always awake. Everyone gets knocked down in the dirt, but I'm stubborn, so things have worked out really nicely."

***REVIVAL* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

Howard Jones is fired up

BURY TOMORROW

They've gone prog. Just kidding: be prepared for another onslaught of full-hearted metalcore bangers.

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
Five

PRODUCER:
Dan Weller and Will Putney

STUDIO:
Vale studios, Worcestershire

EXPECT:
More riff-heavy, full-throated metalcore with skyscraper choruses, but this time with Hollywood production values.

IT'S BEEN A slow yet steady climb for Bury Tomorrow over the course of this decade; from very nearly splitting up, to making the entire UK scene stand up and take notice on 2012's *The Union Of Crowns*, to playing their biggest-ever headline slots and damn-near ripping everyone's faces off with 2016's *Earthbound*, they have continued to plough forward with growing momentum. Now, with their fifth album in the bag, 2018 promises to be a very big year for this Southampton quintet, as their hulking metalcore anthems have put them in touching distance of becoming a serious proposition in our world. We spoke to vocalist Dani Winter-Bates to find out if we're on the verge of hearing the album that sends Bury Tomorrow over the top.

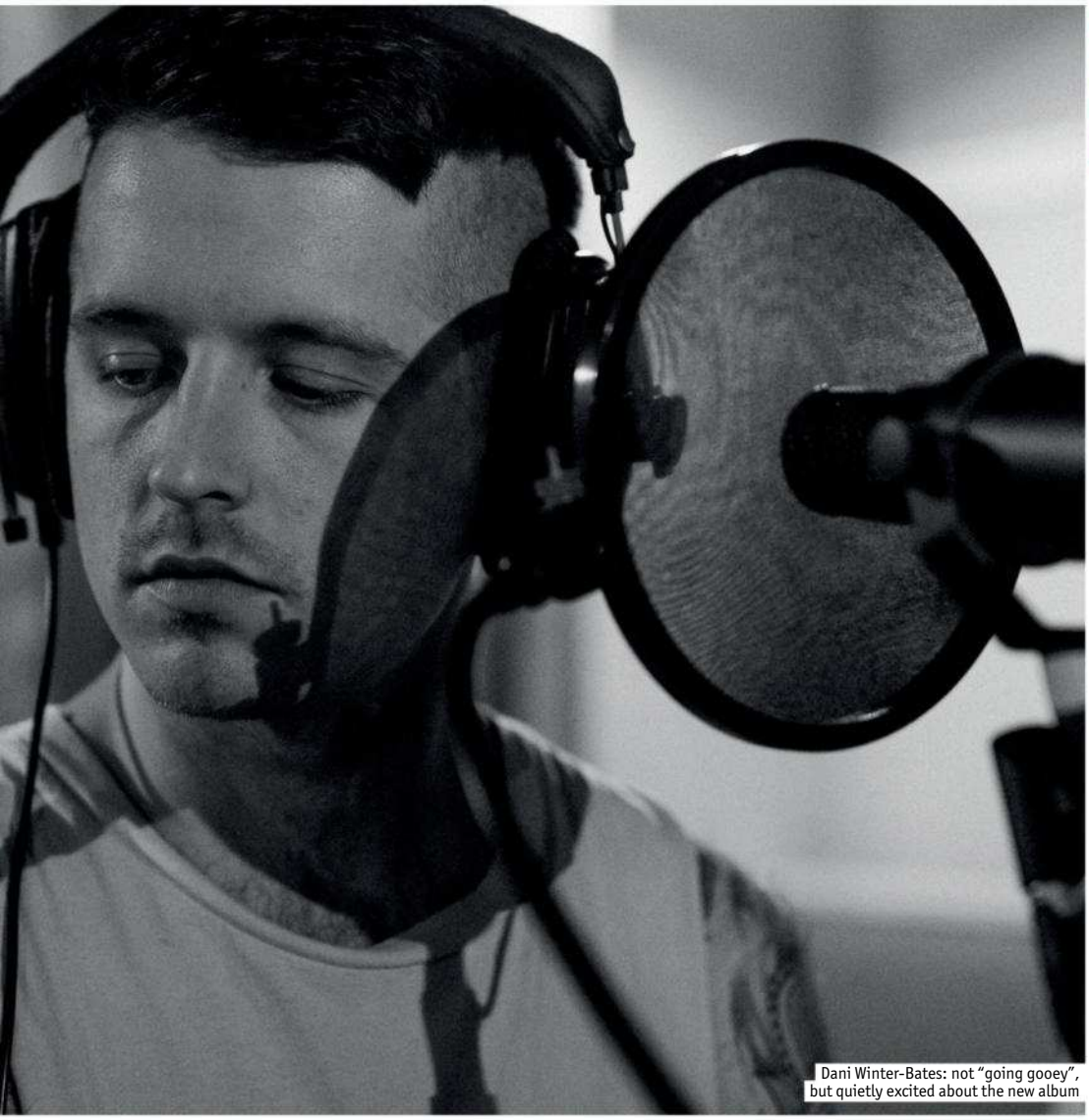
Kristan Dawson leads the way

SO, DANI, HOW ARE YOU FEELING ABOUT THE NEW ALBUM?
"I hate it when bands go all gooey over their new album and spout out all of the 'It's the best thing we've ever done, it's so heavy!', but it's really hard not to be excited when you're so happy with the outcome of these songs. I think we've done what we always do, but we've stretched the boundaries of it out a little bit."

WITH BANDS LIKE PARKWAY DRIVE AND WHILE SHE SLEEPS REDEFINING WHAT A METALCORE BAND CAN DO, HAS THAT INSPIRED ANY STYLISTIC CHANGES IN BURY TOMORROW?
"I mean, we are always going to be what we are; we're a melodic modern metal band, and we're not going to change that too much. But, I think you're right in mentioning those bands and the way they've changed our scene. Parkway Drive now have this massive, epic sound, and then you've got these technical wizards like Architects, so there has been a big growth in the scene over the last few years. Our own development is in our production, I think. We have really gone out of our way to make this album sound cleaner and bigger. I have always had a bit of a problem with our production on certain records, so we really wanted to address that."

PEOPLE MIGHT HEAR THAT AND THINK THAT BURY TOMORROW ARE GOING TO GO MORE POP... SURELY NOT?
"Oh no! Listen, we know we aren't the most extreme band around, but we're a metal band and we are never going to be Radio 1 darlings. This album is still heavy, because, for a start, I'm in the band! I'm not a singer, and I don't see the point of trying to do something

"IT'S BEEN A LONG ROAD. WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE UNDERDOG"



Dani Winter-Bates: not "going gooey", but quietly excited about the new album

that other people have done to a much higher standard. We're doing what we always do, and that's paying homage to bands like Killswitch and At The Gates while updating it with something a bit more modern."

AND, PRESUMABLY, AFTER THE SUCCESS YOU'VE HAD ON FESTIVAL BILLS, HEADLINE AND SUPPORT SLOT TOURS, THIS COULD BE THE RECORD THAT REALLY CEMENTS BURY TOMORROW AS A BIG NAME.

"That would be amazing. We've always just been fans of music, so it's weird to be in a band where all of us have such similar influences, and it's been a long road for us. We have always been the underdog, you know? We aren't the coolest band around, no one looks at us like we're the hot new thing or these style icons. We're just dudes who love heavy metal, so if we can become synonymous with the biggest bands in our scene then it would be extremely satisfying."

AS A BAND WHO REALLY THINK ABOUT YOUR LIVE SHOW, ARE YOU LOOKING TO BUILD ON THOSE FOR THE NEXT ALBUM CYCLE?

"Yeah, exactly: we don't take ourselves very seriously, so we always try and make the shows fun and think about how we can make them that in a different way. We've know now that if we go out and headline we do want to have some production. I'd love pyro, fire and rotating stages, but we look at how a band like A Day To Remember first did it and that inspires us to come up with something a bit more creative." ✠

"OK, who forgot the popcorn?"

THE NEW BURY TOMORROW ALBUM LANDS THIS SUMMER VIA MUSIC FOR NATIONS. THE BAND WILL PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL IN JUNE

10 Things We Learned This Month

WHAT'S ROCKED OUR WORLD AND BLOWN OUR TINY MINDS?

1. GOLDEN GODS VOTING IS STILL OPEN
From Judas Priest to Code Orange to Amenra, you can still decide who walks away with the gold on June 11.

2. DOWNLOAD FEST IS READY TO RUMBLE
NXT is back at Donington in June, so we're packing our lycra.

3. JASON AALON BUTLER IS BACK
The former Letlive man has unveiled new band The Fever 333 – and we love 'em.

4. AND SO ARE HEART OF A COWARD
Complete with new singer Kaan Tasan. Welcome!

5. 5FDP HAVE GONE COUNTRY
Well, a bit. Check out our review on page 84 to see what we mean.

6. JUDAS PRIEST FOR LIFE
The emotional scenes that greeted Glenn Tipton making an appearance with the band onstage last month will stick with us for years to come.

7. OUR PODCAST RULES
We have officially dented iTunes Top 10 music podcasts. Cheers for all your support.

8. *REIGN IN BLOOD* MAKES GREAT AD MUSIC
Energy company OVO used the iconic track in their recent campaign. The internet lost its shit, of course.

9. THERE'S AN IRON MAIDEN PINBALL MACHINE
Honest to Satan, if there are any millionaires who want to sponsor us so we can get one for research purposes, we're listening.

10. DEVIN IS BACK IN THE STUDIO
The Devin Townsend Project might be on hiatus, but you can't keep a good man down. We can't wait to see what he comes up with next.

AT THE GATES

BLINDED BY FEAR

Tomas Lindberg opens up on the song that defined melodeath and inspired a generation

WORDS: JAMES WEAVER • ILLUSTRATION: MARK LEARY

FLASH BACK TO 1995. Thrash metal was dead, death metal had reached its peak and grunge ruled the airwaves. The extreme end of metal was screaming for innovation and At The Gates were about to change the landscape of heavy music forever. Setting a whole new precedent for infusing melody with extremity, the release of *Slaughter Of The Soul* on November 14 of that year cemented the Swedes' place at the top of the food chain, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Slaughter Of The Soul's impact is gargantuan but at its core there is one track that glistens with unprecedented quality: *Blinded By Fear*. Regarded to this day as one of the most seminal and influential melodeath songs ever written, the song hurtled At The Gates into the stratosphere, and as vocalist Tomas Lindberg reflects 23 years after it first pounded eardrums, he admits he had no idea just how big an impact it would have.

"We tried to write the best goddamn song we ever could. This was the first time we sat down and tried to craft the blueprint for what we believed to be our future; we didn't have any clue what was going to happen after that, we just wanted to do something new. Melodic death metal didn't exist when we wrote it, we were just a death metal band and we wanted to incorporate more classic songwriting into our sound without losing the formula of being a death metal band."

At The Gates: they gave *Slaughter Of The Soul* their all... and we are forever grateful

"BLINDED... WAS THE LAST SONG WE WROTE FOR THAT ALBUM!"

For all of its impact on the development of melodic death metal, Tomas is incredibly modest as he thinks back to the track's inception. With the reception to 1994's *Terminal Spirit Disease* not going as they had hoped, Tomas knew At The Gates had to bring their A-game for what came next. With a charged and focused mentality and a subsequent gruelling recording process, they crafted what would become their magnum opus.

"We pushed ourselves to the max! I remember Fredrik [Nordström, producer] telling Adrian [Erlandsson, drums] he wanted to see his hand that was holding the snare, the stick that was going to hit the snare, that it should be up to his shoulder on every stroke." It was a performance that resulted in a nosebleed and physical exhaustion after hammering away at over 80 takes.

THROUGH THE CHURNING and ominous sounds of a machine gearing into life before roaring into an onslaught of riffing, *Blinded By Fear*'s opening is infamous. This opening, the essence of the track, is the fusion of the old and new.

"*Blinded By Fear* was actually written last for that record," Tomas reveals. "It became that big opening song because we felt we didn't have one. All the classic records that we liked, they all had that classic opener. They introduced the record, they lured everyone in." Of that unique, mechanised intro, he adds: "The early 90s had industrial metal. It was that kind of time. We wanted the record to sound mechanical because it is so tight and precise so we figured some sort of intro like that would really work."

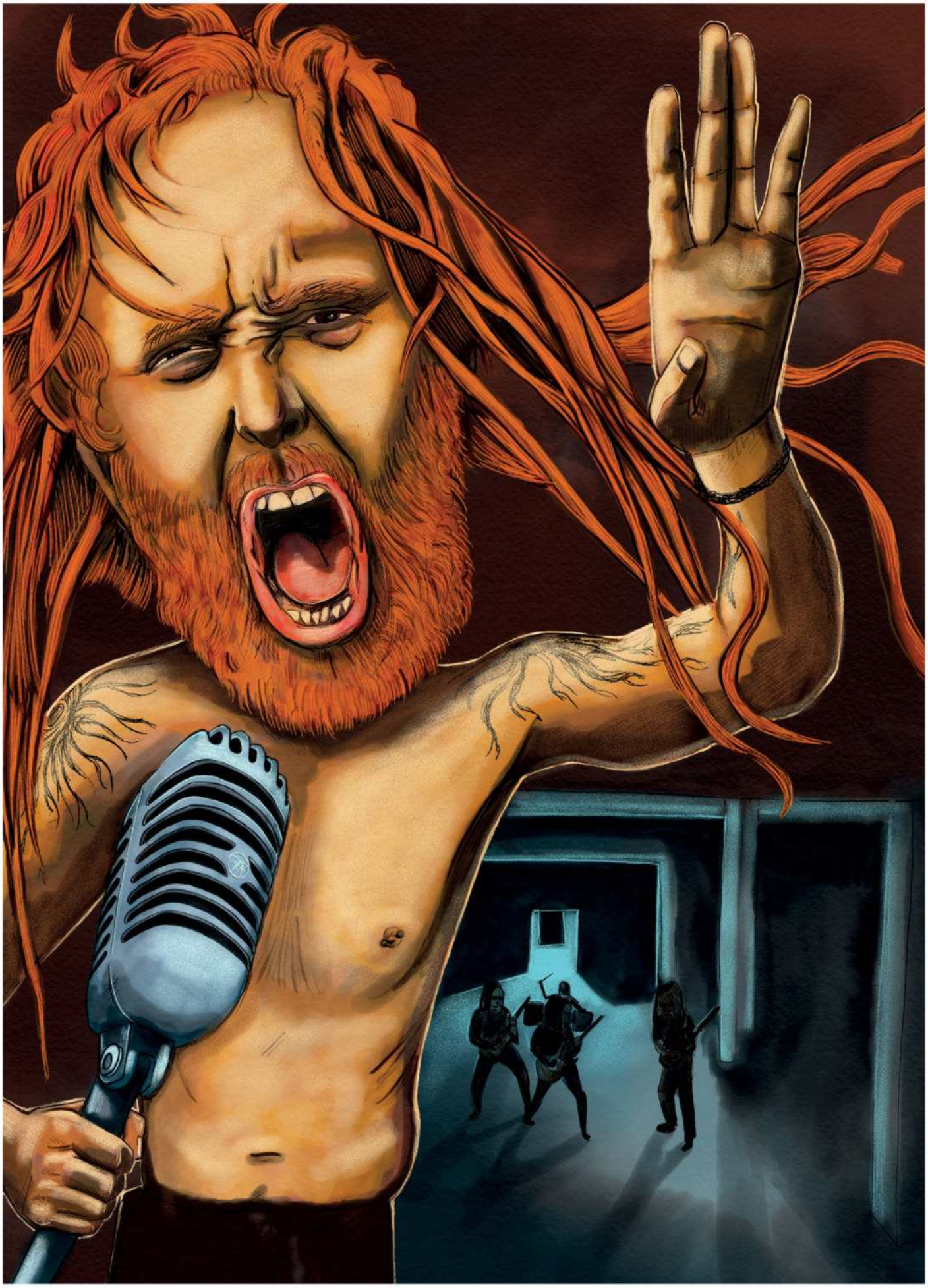
While the music displayed with *Blinded By Fear* set the wheels in motion for what would become the linchpin of melodic death metal, dig beneath the surface and you'll find lyrical exploration that was as cutting edge as the music itself, drawing on themes of paranoia and fear of a world quickly going to shit.

"At the time I was 22 and trying to figure out the world and being really frustrated," Tomas muses. "There was a lot of social commentary but from a personal perspective, the world is fucked up."

Over two decades on, *Blinded By Fear* still arguably stands as At The Gates' finest moment, the catalyst that cemented their legacy. Still very much a staple in their live arsenal, Tomas concludes, that even after all these years, the song is still essential.

"When we put together the set and we think of the build-up and the flow, *Blinded By Fear* is an essential part of it. It has all the elements of an At The Gates song. It's not just in the set because we have to play it because it's 'the hit song'. It's in the set because it still has a purpose." ✠

***TO DRINK FROM THE NIGHT ITSELF* IS OUT MAY 18 VIA CENTURY MEDIA**



CANDACE KUCSULAIN

WALLS OF JERICHO

Walls Of Jericho's nails-throated frontwoman explains how power lifting has helped her mind and her body

WORDS: ALI COOPER • PICS: JEREMY SAFFER

WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALISE TRAINING WAS A BIG PART OF YOUR LIFE, CANDACE?
"Walls Of Jericho did Ozzfest 2006, where everybody was deadlifting barbells from the floor up their legs backstage. I wasn't as strong as I thought I'd be so that gave me a challenge and that started me off. I did my first powerlifting meet four months after I had my daughter in 2011 and I was sold – I'd never competed in any sports before, so the environment was a whole new world for me. Now I get to coach at the powerlifting gym that I also train at."

HOW DOES THE POWERLIFTING WORLD COMPARE TO THE MUSIC INDUSTRY?
"There's a lot less politics in powerlifting and you don't have to rely on other people because your training and determination prepares you, whereas in music you have to depend on a label and people buying your records. It's a lot like the hardcore scene because it's more underground – not everybody's cut out to do it. Just as bands know what it's like to sleep on floors and drive for hours to play shows, everyone's at a lifting meet for the same reason and you've worked very hard to be there. You grind because you love it."

Chalk is cheap (but essential)

Adding a couple more just for shits and giggles

"I HAD TO GET MY BACK POPPED BACK INTO PLACE"

WHAT ISSUES HAVE YOU FACED AS A WOMAN IN THE LIFTING WORLD?
"I'll admit that when I was younger, I would go into the gym with a completely different goal because my main concern back then was aesthetics, what the scales said and what size pants I wore. It's a very difficult thing to tackle as a female growing up in a society which puts so much pressure on looking a certain way, but going into the gym with a goal to empower myself now is much healthier and more sustainable."

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT SO FAR?
"For a few years, I've attended a Relentless Powerlifting meet to raise money for children with cancer and life-threatening illnesses. Through talking about it onstage and through lifting, we've been able to raise thousands of dollars and make a real difference in the world by coming together to lift twice a year."

DO YOU FIND TRAINING HAS IMPROVED YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?
"I'm constantly striving for a better version of me to make life less stressful. Part of my training is being able to manage stress levels which is a wonderful thing I've learned. Before powerlifting, I took everything on my shoulders and I thought I could handle everything, but through this I learned to let things go, too."

HOW DO YOU STAY FIT ON TOUR?
"It's hard to get enough food in every day, so I'm always wondering where I'm going to get protein and carbs even when I pack my bag with oatmeal bars, protein and peanut butter. We usually put on our rider that we need to know the nearest gym to the venue we're playing."

IS POWERLIFTING DANGEROUS?
"I've probably hurt myself more onstage than I have powerlifting. I've never needed surgery because I have good coaches and people around me to help me keep moving. I was being a meathead once and I lifted as heavy as I possibly could and I pulled my sacroiliac joint so I had to get it popped back into place. I'd rather injure myself doing something cool like deadlifting 325lb than lifting a laundry basket at home!"

ON A SCALE OF 1-10, HOW METAL IS HAVING A LOVE OF POWERLIFTING?
"Definitely 10! Anybody who does this and dedicates themselves to it without giving up is super-badass to me. I do it because I love it and I think it's badass!" ✠

***NO ONE CAN SAVE YOU FROM YOURSELF* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM.**
TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT RELENTLESS POWERLIFTING, JUST HEAD TO WWW.RELENTLESSPOWERLIFTING.COM

Candace is no dumb-belle

All this and she's not even tyred...

Remind us never to piss off Candace...

GET INVOLVED

THE EDUCATION

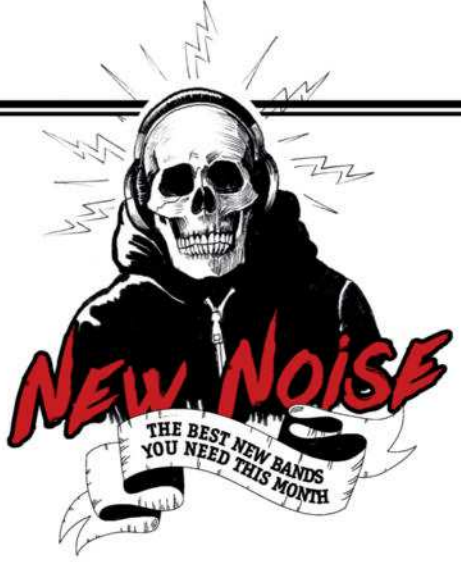
Candace recommends research as an essential tool for budding lifters. "Watch videos of other people lifting with good techniques," Candace says. "Be a student of your sport and educate yourself." You can find Candace's YouTube channel on youtube.com/user/KikiPuopolo

THE NETWORKING

Social media is vital for communicating with likeminded trainers to gain insights from people just like you. Simply scroll through relevant Facebook groups and Twitter hashtags to discover the powerlifting community.

THE PODCAST

Candace suggests Westside Barbell podcaster Louie Simmons to learn some invaluable information on programming your training effectively to suit you. You can listen over at westsidebarbell.podbean.com



HAGGARD CAT

From the ashes of one of the UK's greatest live bands, Heck, comes a balls-out, batshit, rock'n'roll freight train

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

SOUNDS LIKE:
Rip-roaring rock'n'roll taken on a stylistic bender

FOR FANS OF:
Every Time I Die, '68, Future Of The Left

LISTEN TO:
American Graffiti

AFTER HAVING SPENT half a decade obliterating the UK scene, the announcement that Heck were to split in August 2017 was a sad moment for contemporary metal. Fans needn't have worried too much, however; it took less than 24 hours for vocalist Matt Reynolds and drummer Tom Marsh to birth a new project screaming into the world.

"It was a mixed bag of emotions," admits Matt. "The last ever Heck show was on my birthday, the first day of ArcTanGent. I didn't realise until we stepped onto the stage how much it all meant to us, and as we came on we were all tearing up. Coming out to a tent full of people all screaming for us and then having it flash by in an instant was strange – it left a certain empty feeling. But, the next day we gave birth to the next step, so it was like a passing of the torch from one band to the next."

It might seem like a surprisingly quick turnover, but the truth is that Haggard Cat had been quietly building steam in the background for quite some time. In fact, the project was initially formed way back in 2011 while Heck (who were then called Baby Godzilla) were just starting to earn their reputation as the UK's most exciting live band.

"It started out as something just for Tom and I to have fun with," Matt explains. "We played together for years and years, even before Baby Godzilla/Heck were a thing. We just happened to have a group of songs together that felt like an album – but not a Heck album – so we booked studio time and treated ourselves like it was a holiday. Both bands are labours of love, but it wasn't a case of picking one over another – we just had to keep making music."

"THIS PROJECT EXISTED EVEN BEFORE HECK DID"

AS 50% OF the frenetic force of energy that was Heck, it's not surprising that a similar creative dynamism buzzes through Haggard Cat's output. "We wanted to take that and be as honest as we could with it, making the most bare-bones, raw and honest thing we could," Matt says. "I'll let people decide for themselves where the line resides and if we have the same fire inside as Heck, but either way it's something that's very personal to Tom and I."

Of course, many will be looking for Haggard Cat to replicate the creative energy of Heck – their incendiary

Tom Marsh and Matt Reynolds: colourful characters

performances were nigh-legendary, after all. "I don't think we'll ever dial it back – it's not in our nature as performers," Matt admits. "Tom and I really pride ourselves on being a band for the live environment. It's something you can't fake and you can't force, because it's very obvious when a band does that."

There is nothing forced about Haggard Cat – their sound is open to stylistic experimentation, initial demo-album *Charger* crossing raw rock'n'roll with hardcore punk freak-outs. Debut-proper *Challenger* ramps this effect up to 1,000, leading singles *The Patriot* and *American Graffiti* maintaining the core Haggard Cat sound, while the harmonies on *Goldberg* bring an almost Beatles-like sonic left-turn into the mix. Then there's the record closer, *High Roller* – a track that is less Haggard Cat and more, um, *Aristocats*.

"I really love the trumpet," Matt gleefully says. "We were listening to Aerosmith's *Dude Looks Like A Lady*, the bit where the brass comes in over the riff, and it just sounded like a party. We were playing the riff to *High Roller* and felt like we never wanted to stop playing it, so we got a trumpet to make it sound like we were marching out of the studio, forcing everyone to join in that party. We've got a good friend called Rob Squirrel playing on it as well, which is great – he's an American and has a bonkers personality. That personality really comes out on it; it could fall off the rails at any point, but doesn't."

It's safe to say that while Heck may be done, their spiritual successors aren't dialling it down for anyone. ✠

***CHALLENGER* IS OUT NOW VIA EARACHE. HAGGARD CAT ARE CURRENTLY TOURING THE UK – CHECK OUT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/HAGGARDCAT FOR DATES**

SIMON COOPER

Primal Rite are kicking their way to the top of the hardcore pile

PRIMAL RITE

The new face of Bay Area rage are smashing down boundaries in every sense possible

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

SOUNDS LIKE:
Much like Power Trip, a tour of all the things that ever made you fall in love with fast, brutally heavy music.

FOR FANS OF:
Integrity, Power Trip, Cro-Mags

LISTEN TO:
Antivenom

FOR MANY YEARS now, the metal scene has been talked up as a place where we can move freely whatever our political, religious or sexual persuasion and where racial boundaries don't exist, but it's taken a while to reach a point where any level of real multiculturalism in the metal scene is truly evident. In 2018, there are more signs than ever that boundaries are coming down, and that people are being given the space to be themselves.

"I used to go to shows and act a certain way because I felt that that was what was expected of me," says Lucy Xavier, vocalist of savage Bay Area hardcore crew Primal Rite. "I thought that because this music is aggressive, I had to be this aggressive badass. But when I came to terms with who I was – I've only been living as a female for a few years – I was able to look at the scene and feel more accepted and more part of it. Because I accepted *myself*. I don't think you can really be happy until you do that. Our scene is about reality, and you need to find that in yourself and that's when you'll become accepted."

Lucy is one of a growing number of openly LGBT figures with voices that are becoming more prominent in our world. When asked whether she predicts a time when her presence is the 'norm', she's typically philosophical and thoughtful about it.

"I see these struggles as the struggle of the time," she shrugs. "Is race and racism still a problem? Absolutely. It's gotten better – when I think of the struggles my grandparents' generation had, fighting for a voice for different minority groups, it's not the same now – but it never quite goes away. I look at my situation, and people's attitudes to the transgender community now, as that; I'm doing what the civil rights movement had to do 50 years ago. These are the situations that need to be dealt with today. And it's great that I can have a voice here, when you consider the [transgender-centred US legislation] bathroom bill, and the still-prevailing attitude to my community, I'm happy to be able to voice that."

"IT'S GREAT THAT TRANS SINGERS LIKE ME HAVE A VOICE HERE"

DESPITE ALL THIS, Lucy is loathe to be portrayed as a leader in any progressive moment. She says she's just doing her bit.

"I'm just trying to tell things from my perspective: that of a queer, Asian hardcore fan, about the world as I see it. And hopefully give people a different voice and open up a new dialogue."

As far as intentions for forming a band go, Lucy has a compelling one. It helps that Primal Rite's debut album, *Dirge Of Escapism*, a stunning marriage of bowel-loosening heavy riffs and unstoppable pace, is the perfect soundtrack to her thoughts and concerns from a view that hasn't always been articulated in metal.

"I always felt that a lot of the bands I loved were so super-honest and so real," she continues, "that sometimes the words they speak could be too obtuse to truly understand. Like, they were so angry you could only *feel* that true anger, but not *direct* it. I want to give something that was… maybe… a little more thoughtful."

It's great to find a band that are trying to change the perceptions of the scene they find themselves in, and Primal Rite are set to do that and then some. Most casual observers would consider *Dirge Of Escapism* to be fuelled by crossover thrash, but drummer Jeremy tells us they don't see themselves part of that scene at all.

"If anything, this record was far more inspired by early death metal," he insists. "There is also a heap of Obituary in there, but we've also mixed that sludge-heavy metallic sound with the pace of punk. We're much more than a crossover band."

While they may disagree on a few key ingredients, one thing the bandmembers agree on is the fact that they have a strong affinity with the modern hardcore scene. When the hardcore utopia arrives, will Primal Rite be on the forefront of the revolution? Code Orange's Grammy nomination gives everyone hope, right?

"We just want to make music that we love, and express ourselves in the way that we see fit," explains Lucy. "If it becomes bigger… well, those people are going to have to come to us, because we're not going to come to them."

Those people might be heading their way a lot sooner than they think… ✠

***DIRGE OF ESCAPISM* IS OUT NOW VIA REVELATION**

hmv RECOMMENDED

discover the best new releases

A Perfect Circle
Eat The Elephant
out now on CD & vinyl
The American rockers are back with their first album in 14 years. Includes Talk Talk, The Doomed and Disillusioned.

My Indigo
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out now on CD & vinyl
The first studio album by Dutch singer/songwriter and Within Temptation's Sharon den Adel with her solo musical project My Indigo.

Behemoth
Messe Noire
out now on CD/Blu-ray, CD/DVD & vinyl
Polish black metal gods recorded live in 2016 performing The Satanist in its entirety.

TesseracT
Sonder
out now on CD & vinyl
Pioneers of the ever-evolving metal scene and unstoppable force of off-kilter riffs and soaring melodies are back with their fourth studio album.

Skindred
Big Tings
out now on CD & vinyl
This is a magnificent beast churning out heavy, distortion-laden riff punches melting into vocalist Benji Webbe's frenzied rapping.

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Kings Among Scotland
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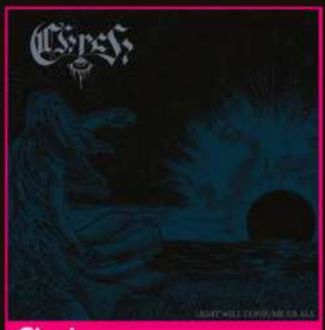

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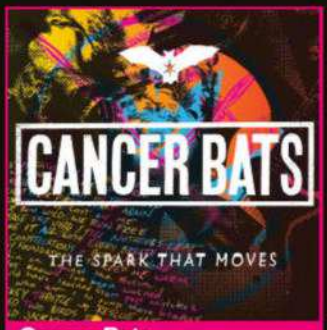

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Hawthorne Heights
Bad Frequencies
out now on CD & vinyl
The Ohio based emo rockers' first full-length album since 2013. Includes the single Pink Hearts.

Galactic Empire
Episode II
out 4 May on CD & vinyl
Featuring 11 new takes on old favourites, the force is strong on this album. For both Star Wars and metal fans alike.

Parkway Drive
Reverence
out 4 May on CD & vinyl
Sixth studio album from the metalcore band, their most sonically adventurous and emotionally intense effort yet.

Dimmu Borgir
Eonian
out 4 May on CD & vinyl
Long-awaited new album from Norwegian black metal icons. Deeper, darker and more epic than before.

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Nomvdic: the power of PMA

NOMVDIC

Blood, death and Satan? Fuck that shit: this Floridian mob are using death metal – and memes – to promote the power of positivity

WORDS: MATT MILLS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Vicious breakdowns wrapped up in technical chops and uplifting lyrics

FOR FANS OF:
Within the Ruins, Whitechapel, Veil Of Maya

LISTEN TO:
Nexus

"IT CHANGED OUR lives!" laughs James Lewis, the enthusiastic frontman of Tampa's progressive death metal machine, Nomvdic. The singer is beaming as he speaks about his band's latest piece of mass-promotion, which came from the most unanticipated of places: a Facebook page called Deathcore Memes, which currently boasts around 300,000 likes and has become a stalwart part of metal online culture in 2018. As it happens, the band's super-PMA lyrical approach fit perfectly with a meme that was dominating the page at the time.

"One of our best friends from south Florida runs the page," James continues. "I just threw the idea of us using it at him by saying, 'Oh, this could be funny, because we have really positive lyrics', and there was a meme going around in the metal scene of Skeletor saying 'I don't like to feel good. I like to feel evil!'"

With the meme-related possibilities apparently infinite, the Facebook page quickly promoted its home state's experimental quartet by sharing the group's video for their new, standalone single, *Nexus*.

"We didn't see any reactions to the video by anyone other than our friends. And then, all of a sudden, it just blew up!" the singer exclaims of their sudden success.

With the uploaded clip reaching an incredible 100,000 views on Facebook in less than a fortnight, it soon became clear that not only was the unusual approach a rousing success, but that Nomvdic is no joke. Juxtaposing crushing breakdowns and downtuned riffs with such uplifting lines as *'Let your heart shine'* and *'I am a pioneer of my own inner fear'*, their latest track soon became just as notorious for its wholesome message as it did its musical destructiveness.

"It's about personal experiences. It's basically about coming out of horror or fear and moving on into the next step," James says of the single's lyrical concept. "Everything we do is very conceptual. The last line of *Nexus* is, *'Blistered from the hell I came from, I will live!'* It's a transition, that's where it came from."

"I just describe it as 'progressive metal'," guitarist Nicolas Zayas elaborates of the band's bold sound. "I don't like to dwell too far into 'Oh, that's super-atmospheric or blackened.' We write progressive metal music."

Nexus marks a major transition for Nomvdic as musicians, too, as they aspire to distance themselves from the dark despondency that has perpetuated not just metal as a whole, but also their earlier material.

"When we were just friends hanging out, we met weekly and watched horror movies," explains James. "But when you start getting more traction and play a hundred shows a year, singing about horror movies gets a little annoying. So *Nexus* was intended to be a transition from horror into our next EP, called *Euphoria*."

Nomvdic eagerly label their upcoming disc as "a very emotional, very vulnerable album," due to follow in the same conceptual yet unyieldingly heavy footsteps of the *Nexus* track.

And with the unabashedly positive madness of *Nexus* causing an unexpected online shitstorm in the deathcore scene, we can only imagine how much buzz half a dozen more tunes delivered in the same vein will generate. Crushing death metal as a soundtrack for positivity? Yep, we're into it. ✠

"SKELETOR REALLY HELPED OUR VIDEO BLOW UP"

NOMVDIC'S *HORROR* EP IS OUT NOW. A NEW ONE IS DUE FOR RELEASE LATER THIS YEAR – WATCH THIS SPACE

Before Lamb Of God there was Burn The Priest...

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Møl: existence is futile?

MØL

These Danes are taking the blackened shoegaze scene into a heavier, uglier realm

WORDS: LUKE MORTON

SOUNDS LIKE:
The bastard offspring of My Bloody Valentine and Frostbite

FOR FANS OF:
Deafheaven, Alcest, Oathbreaker

LISTEN TO:
Bruma

SINCE DEAFHEAVEN BROKE into the metal consciousness in 2013 with the hipster-baiting *Sunbather*, our world has been well aware of the burgeoning black metal/shoegaze scene that was bubbling under the surface for years. Sure, bands like Alcest had been experimenting with the hybrid genre long before, but now there's a deluge of great bands mixing the two previously contrasting sounds.

"It's playing metal in major," jokes Kim Song, vocalist for Møl (Danish for moth). But this isn't some namby-pamby pedalboard bollocks: the Aarhus five-piece are bringing serious bite and venom to the ethereality.

Kim joined Møl two and a half years ago, having known the band for years while working as a gig photographer – he even shot Møl's first show. With two EPs already in the bank, Kim's contribution as front-man and main lyricist has seen the band move into a "heavier" direction with new album *Jord*, as Kim himself comes from death metal and hardcore background. But, of course, that hasn't stopped kvlt purists decreeing the so-called blackgaze movement as not tr00 metal.

"There are traditionalists and people who like metal like it was in the 'good old days'," says Kim, "but it's onstage where you can convince people with this music. It's great on record, but ultimately most of us connect with the live experience and the ferocity, the epicness that you can display live with your body. People might not like this particular type of music, but they can have a great experience from it."

This might sound like a refuge for hippies and those looking for a spiritual awakening, but *Jord* is steeped in bleakness. It tells tales of impermanence and humanity's fleeting, futile existence against a background of expansive soundscapes and scorching vocals. Not one for gran's birthday party then. Kim says that this obsession with mortality and our own brevity comes from growing up in a country of seasonal changes, but also as a reaction to experiencing death and grief multiple times in his life.

"There are always ups and downs, there are people you look up to, but you find out they're human and they fail you," he says. "The quicker you accept that change will come, and how you position yourself to deal with that kind of situation, will make you get through the process faster and be happier about where you are."

THE IDEA OF our own impermanence is at its strongest on standout track (and Kim's favourite) *Bruma*, which bellows the foreboding, self-aware line: *'Our glow will fade and die / Still we think ourselves timeless.'*

"This song resonates a lot, especially in this day and age, about returning to something simple, something that's not as hectic or as confusing as our world is. If you talk about judgement day, you can interpret that, but it ends pretty well in that sense of burning free. We're all going to die eventually, so there is some memento mori."

Alongside the changes in Kim's life, there has been an evolution musically, as he sings in Danish for the first time on both *Jord*'s title-track and *Vakuum* (the rest being in English).

"The other guys had to convince me it was a good idea," admits Kim. "It got much more personal in regards to the songwriting: when you sing in your native language it becomes a bit more real."

But what spurred on the decision? Kim theorises that "when the world seems too scary" and the political landscape is in disarray, people re-find their roots and reconnect with what it means to be native. He says although he was originally against the idea, the lyrics to *Jord* just fit.

"The theme of the song is the burst of life that gets us up in the morning to go do stuff. But this thirst for something more can end up destroying you, it can be our downfall, it can be a motivator but it can be a sickness – it can be slavery to your soul if you're not aware of the thirst taking control. This hunger can eventually destroy us." ✠

"YOU HAVE TO WIN OVER THE TRADITIONALISTS ONSTAGE"

***JORD* IS OUT NOW VIA HOLY ROAR**

Fed up of hardcore trying to twist itself into new shapes? Traditionalists Stone are keeping it real

STONE

KAT NIJMEDDIN

Stone are rolling with a great hardcore legacy

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

SOUNDS LIKE:
Ultra-aggressive hardcore from as deep and dark an underground as you would care to go.

FOR FANS OF:
Madball, Trapped Under Ice, Terror

LISTEN TO:
Skeletons

WITH THE ABSOLUTELY phenomenal, groundbreaking success of Code Orange in 2017, hardcore seems to finally have a platform to crossover to be the darling of the alternative world. Luckily for us, there is a whole heap of bands waiting behind them to continue the genre's growth as we head forward.

"To me it feels like something similar to the 90s boom," says Stone vocalist Zach Dear. "You know, where things like Dynamo would happen. You've got 90,000 people at a festival with Biohazard headlining on *State Of The World Address*. That, to me, is hardcore, but with that glass ceiling that hardcore provides being shattered for a brief time. It was hardcore's version of the Big 4: Biohazard, Madball and Agnostic Front. But now, I feel like it's really close again, with bands like Code Orange and Turnstile pushing it, and Roadrunner getting people who are from that hardcore scene behind the desks. All the little pieces are evolving."

WITH THIS IN mind, Stone have a real chance to capitalise on the new-found popularity of hardcore music. Theirs is a much more traditional take on the kind of crushing, beatdown-heavy, bone-snapping aggression that came straight from CBGB's back in the genre's formative years, and debut album *Inch Of Joy* will almost certainly have veterans and newbies alike frothing at the mouth.

"WE'RE CLOSE TO GETTING A NEW HARDCORE BIG 4"

"Yeah, we're not really doing anything to reinvent the wheel," admits Zach, "unlike some of those bands I mentioned earlier. But I think that's fine, because to some kids we *are* the wheel! There are people now who have only been exposed to a band like Code Orange, and if they can get into that and then find us, we're going to sound like this whole new world to them. You know, not everyone gets to hear Bad Brains or The Cro-Mags first. We'd be honoured to be a part of that legacy."

So does Zach feel that we're getting closer to finally seeing this defiantly underground music becoming a staple at events like The Grammys? After all, Code Orange got a nomination this year...

"I think there is a long way to go before that happens," he muses. "If it ever happens at all. I just know that I'm happy being in a hardcore band. There are, obviously, very many differences to what we do and to what the bands that we were originally talking about before are trying to do. And this music is deliberately meant to be for outsiders and underdogs. I love how it's evolving, but I also think that that is part of its strength, and I think kids will see through it if it doesn't come from a real place at its heart. Put it this way: I'm not holding out any hope that we are getting a Grammy nomination any time soon, and I'm OK with that."

For all of its forward momentum, it's good to have some defenders on the scene to keep it real. Hardcore fans, new and old, Stone are that band.

***INCH OF JOY* IS OUT NOW VIA PURE NOISE**

These Septic Stars: the new breed

THESE SEPTIC STARS

This Southampton crew are binning off their hometown influences to make a whole new breed of noise

WORDS: MATT MILLS

SOUNDS LIKE:
The meaty riffs of djent uniting with the swagger of nu metal.

FOR FANS OF:
Sikth, Faith No More, Cane Hill

LISTEN TO:
It Begins With I

WITH SIGNIFICANT EXPORTS in recent years including names like Our Hollow, Our Home and Bury Tomorrow, the city of Southampton is becoming the home of 21st-century metalcore, awash with young, mid-2000s-inspired melody-makers, desperately yearning to reap the same rewards as their hometown heroes. So where the hell did These Septic Stars come from?!

"The market at the moment in metal is saturated with metalcore and hardcore," bassist Jonathan 'Fishi' Salter admits of his group's local scene. "I hate to say it, but a lot of bands in Southampton go down that same genre. To me, a lot of it sounds like it's just a following."

"It gives us a bit of an edge because we're the band that shocks the most on bills," adds frontman Matt Savage. "We don't want to conform to what we should sound like, we just make what we want our music to sound like. Someone once said that 'If Rage Against the Machine and Incubus had sex, the end result would be These Septic Stars', which I want written on my tombstone," he laughs.

The description is accurate. Mixing the funky swagger of nu metal with a techy edge inspired by the likes of Sikth and Enter Shikari, These Septic Stars pump out infectious yet complex anthems that hoist them above their formula-following peers. Jonathan's slap-bass stylings and Kyle Fenton's drums both tap-dance wildly beneath the fat, polyrhythmic chops of guitarists Wayne Wooldridge and Tom Moore, all topped off by Matt's vocals, which inhabit a constant limbo between clean singing and all-out rapping.

"There's a lot of technique when it comes to musicianship in the band," Jonathan acknowledges, as These Septic Stars stand on the precipice of bringing their avant-garde unpredictability to new heights: their long-awaited debut album, *They Were Already Dead When We Got Here*, landed earlier this month. Boasting a cavalcade of innovative yet infectious tunes and bolstered by the adventurous lead single *It Begins With I*, the disc is, bizarrely, a concept that even predates the outfit that created it.

"It's been something that we've been working since before we were even a band," explains Jonathan. "The name of the album is to do with the fact that, in our hometown, a lot of the bands that we started playing with are gone now. A lot of the artists that we listen to are gone now, as well. That was a few years ago now, so to see that we're making a debut album with that title makes me proud."

Thanks to mavens like Cane Hill, Ocean Grove and King 810, nu metal-indebted music has once again become big news in 2018. And with their first full-length release now in the mix, it's only a matter of time before These Septic Stars fully capitalise upon their subgenre's reinvigorated popularity, spreading their eclectic brand of glorious anarchy to greener pastures. ✠

"IF RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE AND INCUBUS HAD SEX, YOU'D GET US"

***THEY WERE ALREADY DEAD WHEN WE GOT HERE* IS OUT NOW**

NEW NOISE ROUND-UP

MORE YOUNG BLOOD YOU NEED IN YOUR LIFE

VNDTA

Mixing the groove of Pantera with techy breakdowns and high-powered, poppy hooks, Hertfordshire quartet VNDTA are one of the most unique bands on the scene right now. Check out recent EP *Pale Glow*.

LISTEN TO: *Martyr*

GIVER

These five German punks deal in the kind of metallicised riffs and gang vocal chants that fans of everyone from While She Sleeps to Cancer Bats will enjoy. Dig in and thank us later.

LISTEN TO: *Heat Of Dark*

SOREPTION

Brutal, technical death metal is what these Swedes offer, and with a new album due for release later this year via Sumerian, you can expect these guys to be all up in your grill very soon.

LISTEN TO: *Reveal The Unseen*

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WELCOME TO THE END OF GHOST AS YOU KNOW IT

Papa Emeritus III is dead. In his place come two new characters that will take the Ghost story into a whole new dimension. We sit down with band mastermind Tobias Forge to find out what the holy hell is going on

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE • PICTURES: JEREMY SAFFER

"I am Papa Emeritus 0. The party is over and now a new era begins. The Middle Ages begin now."

It was September 30, 2017 that the world of Ghost was changed forever. Onstage in Gothenburg, Sweden, halfway through an encore performance of setlist staple *Monstrance Clock*, Papa Emeritus III, the frontman and centrepiece of Ghost's most successful chapter yet, was unceremoniously hauled offstage by a couple of heavies, while his beloved Nameless Ghouls looked on in confusion. Soon after, a shady, fragile new figure emerged, shuffling onto the stage with the help of a walking stick and an oxygen mask, bedecked in corpsepaint and papal robes. This, apparently, was Papa 0. And, as he addressed the bemused crowd with those prophetic, aforementioned words, two things were clear: 1) Ghost were never going to be the same again. And 2) we had no fucking idea what to expect next.

"It would be foolish of me to assume that everyone around me understands what's going on in my head," smirks Tobias Forge in a swanky office in the middle of Kensington six months later. "It's a bit of a struggle."

Today, *Hammer* is sitting with the man who officially outed himself as the brainchild of all things Ghost back in the summer of 2017, for a world-exclusive first interview that will lift the lid on the Swedish enigma's new album, *Prequelle*, the concepts within it, and the brand new characters it will welcome to the Ghost story. Dressed in skinny jeans, Converse and a Death tee, his short, jet black hair spiked up, Tobias looks a world away from the colourful cast of characters he has created: a proud metal nerd pulling the strings behind one of the most fascinating music phenomenons of recent times. Like Maiden, Marilyn Manson and Slipknot before them, Ghost have become one of those rare bands for whom a new album is so much more than a new album; it's an event, a chance for fans to wait with baited breath to see what new imagery, art and feats of showmanship await them, and how it'll add to an ongoing narrative that has captivated our scene. And, in the way only the very best bands manage, it seems like just as we were starting to get used to the Ghost formula, Tobias has fucked with it spectacularly.

"I've always tried to make things hard for myself," he admits with a sly grin. "Instead of just doing big, blunt commercial statements, I'm trying to do things in a more cinematic way. If we just continued with Papa to Papa to Papa to Papa, that would grow very boring. That is a one-dimensional way of looking at this band. If I had just done that, Ghost would have gone on auto-pilot, and it would've grown stale very quickly."

If you're late to this particular party, allow us to produce a brief guide; until now, the frontman of Ghost had always taken the form of Papa Emeritus: a corpsepainted, Pope-like figure delivering sermonic odes to life, love, death, sex and Satan on behalf of the mysterious Clergy, backed onstage by a flock of hooded, anonymous musicians known as the Nameless Ghouls. Each new album meant a 'new Papa' boasting a modified new look, along with a fresh overhaul for his Ghouls and a new stage show. So far, so simple, right? And at first, it seemed like Papa 0 (pronounced "Nil", FYI) was to continue this tradition. Except, that's not entirely what's happened. When Ghost unleashed their first missive of the new era earlier this month – the deliriously catchy, future classic *Rats* – its medieval-inspired video starred a brand new character taking centre stage for the very first time. And his role in the Ghost story is taking this mythos into a whole new dimension.

"I think that the things I am looking forward to excavating on this album are a lot of the things that have not been very clear before," offers Tobias when we ask him how this mysterious new fella fits into Ghost canon. "What I am eager to shine a light on with this record, is the concept of seniority vs junior, master vs apprentice, elders vs youngsters. Therefore, there's a detachment with Papa 0. He's a big character, but he's too old to do this. He can be the elder leader of the church, but he cannot be the entertainer that brings in the masses and gets their rumps shaking. So, he needs a younger, more vibrant person that he can teach. That would be The Cardinal."

"Someone else needs to get the people's rumps shaking. That someone is The Cardinal"

FOR THE FIRST TIME, TOBIAS SPILLS THE BEANS ABOUT HIS LATEST CREATION

Dressed in a black cassock (aka That Black Robe Thing), sunken, haunted eyes peeking out from under his biretta (aka That Black Hat Thing), and sporting the kind of villainous 'tache that would have Dick Dastardly twiddling with glee, Cardinal Copia is part *Monty Python*, part medieval nightmare; the kind of character who perfectly occupies the murky space between camp showmanship and gothic horror that Ghost have inhabited since day one. In short, he's the personification of *Prequelle*: the album that will bring the next evolution in Tobias's vision to life.

"The Cardinal is a character who will, eventually, if he plays his cards right… he could potentially *become* a Papa," reveals the Swede somewhat cryptically. So, then, are we saying that Papa 0 is the aforementioned "master" and The Cardinal is the "apprentice"? Is Papa 0 training The Cardinal to become a new Papa?

"Yes. But that story will happen parallel to the album cycle," Tobias offers a little guardedly when we prod him further. "Without going into more detail, I will say that that story will be told on the side."

Perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised that Tobias remains a little reluctant to pull the curtains too far back at this stage. This is a man who, since revealing his role in Ghost eight months ago, has had to deal with a far more direct level of scrutiny than ever before. After originally establishing his name in the Swedish underground fronting acclaimed death metallers Repugnant, it was with the inception of Ghost that Tobias's

Is Papa 0 a mentor? Or does he have a bigger role to play in the Ghost story?

creativity was allowed to run riot. When single *Elizabeth* was dropped onto an unsuspecting metal scene in June 2010, it sparked a hype machine that has refused to let up since. Upon the arrival of the band's first album, *Opus Eponymous*, that October – flanked by a clutch of You Had To Be There live shows that included a stop at the London Underworld – the machine had already spun into overdrive.

Soon, fans across the world were jabbering away on forums and social media about a band who mixed the riffs of King Diamond and Blue Öyster Cult with some of the most polished hooks you could find outside of an ABBA compilation, all dressed in the visage of corpsepaint, robes and Luciferian undertones. Two more albums – 2013's bombastic *Infestissumam* and 2015's sumptuous *Meliora* – only served to take Ghost further skywards, with the *Meliora* cycle ushering in festival headline sets, a Grammy and almost half a million sales in the process. Now, they stand on the precipice of being one of heavy music's great white hopes for the next decade. Lucky, then, that *Prequelle* is a step Tobias has been preparing to take for longer than you might think.

"There was a clear outline for this record, thematically, years ago," he reveals. "Going into making *Meliora*, I had two piles of songs. I told our producer, Klas Åhlund, that I had two ideas. One was a record that was more futuristic, more urban-based. Then I had another in mind that was way more... *medieval*. We decided to go with the futuristic one first, which became *Meliora*. Now, it's time for medieval. That is *Prequelle*."

If you've noticed the word "medieval" crop up a few times already, it's no coincidence. From the Middle Ages makeup of the characters themselves to the gruesome themes of plague and pestilence running rampant over *Rats, Prequelle* is a sparkly edition of *Horrible Histories* brought to life, Papa 0 its shadowy director and The Cardinal its creepy narrator. If you think this is a simple case of 'metal band makes a metal album about metal-as-fuck things', however, you'd be way off. After all, away from the noise and hype, Ghost have always had hidden depths. *Opus Eponymous* spoke of humanity's doom, *Infestissumam* depicted the Antichrist in a way that affected our deeper sense of self and *Meliora* channelled humanism through the filter of materialistic excess. These are themes that speak to something far beyond clever gimmickry or interesting concepts. They speak to planes both carnal and spiritual, of our very biology and, simultaneously, what it all means beyond flesh and bone. They speak to life and death. To humanity itself.

"There were a few things that I wanted to get in *Prequelle* that I don't think had been fleshed out yet, and had very little to do with what came before," Tobias muses. "This is a record themed with death and the impending end, even if it might just be our own, and in recent years we have seen the passing of many of our elder idols. Ronnie James Dio was one, but I think that, especially, when Lemmy passed away, and Bowie and Prince so close to that, it affected me a lot. It feels like our parents are passing. I think we took people like Lemmy for granted; he was going to sit at our table forever, but now, there is a chair that is loudly empty. It's definitely affected me way more than I thought it would. It's made me want to be a little bit more attentive when it comes to trying to make sure that you're making the best of the opportunities that you have with your seniors. That is something that has affected me and this record a lot. So, does Papa 0 represent the elder preparing to pass on? Yes, he does."

This method of using historical themes and imagery to project very contemporary issues is stamped all over *Rats*. While musically it might just be the most uptempo, dancefloor-friendly number Ghost have produced yet, its lyrics are anything but, taking grim influence from the Black Plague that wiped out almost half of Europe in the 1300s. And yet, as with everything Ghost do, it is a song whose essence could be just as relevant now as in any point in our history. ➤

"We took Lemmy for granted. We have to make the most of our opportunities"

THE PASSING OF METAL LEGENDS HAS DEEPLY AFFECTED TOBIAS AND THE NEW ALBUM

And you thought *your* family was dysfunctional...

MEET THE FAMILY

NAME: Papa Emeritus I
AKA: The first one
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2010-2012
NOTES: Papa Emeritus I was the OG Ghost frontman and could usually be found stalking back and forth on stages wielding his trusty thurible (that's that big, swinging incense burner thingy he used to have). The original, certainly, but arguably not the best.

NAME: Papa Emeritus II
AKA: The scary one
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2013-2015
NOTES: With a far ghastlier looking visage than his predecessor, Papa Emeritus II was also the first Papa to ditch the makeup when he fronted a special, three-song Ghost set for an Australian website in 2014. Though we're still not convinced that was his real face, either.

NAME: Papa Emeritus III
AKA: The dandy
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2015-2017
NOTES: Allegedly the younger brother of Papa Emeritus II, Papa Emeritus III brought a new energy to Ghost, shrugging off his Papal robes mid-set for a snazzy suited-and-booted look that came with a host of sexually charged stage moves. Oooh, the cad.

NAME: Papa Emeritus 0
AKA: The old one
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2017-?
NOTES: Making his stage debut seconds after Papa III was removed, Papa 0 looks older than time itself. His role is seemingly to mentor and welcome his imminent successor. What happens once he is properly replaced?

NAME: The Cardinal
AKA: The new guy
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2018-?
NOTES: A future Papa? The origin of a Papa we've seen before? Only Tobias Forge knows – and he's not telling – but for the first time, we have a character who doesn't fit into what we already know of the Ghost story. We'll have to wait and see what his future holds...

NAME: The Nameless Ghouls
AKA: The band
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2010-?
NOTES: Less individuals and more a mass of souls represented onstage by mysterious, anonymous figures. While we have had five on them onstage to this point, it looks like we may be about to get more Nameless Ghouls for our buck.

NAME: Sister Imperator
AKA: The matriarch
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2016-?
NOTES: A figurehead behind the scenes, the mysterious Sister Imperator has appeared in a number of videos put out by Ghost in recent years. Her ultimate role remains to be seen, but Tobias describes her and Papa 0 as the "mum and dad" of the operation.

NAME: The Clergy
AKA: The main event
YEARS OF SERVICE: 2010-?
NOTES: The mysterious cult from which these strange beings all stepped forth, The Clergy is the centre point for everything that Ghost is, was and shall be. They remain anonymous, omnipotent and powerful. Which is metal as fuck, to be fair.

"Exactly," Tobias agrees. "In the 1340s, when the plague hit Europe, it came in the form of several ships being towed into the port of Messina, and they were filled with dead people. The only thing that came out of those ships when they reached the port were black rats. That was the arrival of the plague to Europe, and it just spread from there.

"But these are not elements to be shrugged off as something that only happened there and then," he continues. "This is all very contemporary. There are millions of people over the last four years alone that will have felt the same apocalyptic reality that they felt here in Europe in the 1300s, when the world was literally collapsing, and they thought God was casting doom in the face of mankind. Death is ever-present."

And the comparisons between now and older times by no means end there. For Tobias, Ghost is a reflection of the way that society can move forward with one step while hurtling itself backwards with another.

"I think we've stepped backwards when it comes to modern society," he theorises. "We say we've grown out of certain immaturities and superstitions, but still, our so-called 'online mannerisms', the way we join forces and become mobs in order to annihilate people, are very medieval. It's very back-to-basics. 'He's a witch! Stone him!' You know? It's very primal, and I think that we are in a time where the idealistic version of ourselves are meeting up with the fucking baboons that we really are. It's a weird dynamic where we are now very uncertain as to who we are. Our roles are being redefined in a way that means our morals and our ways of wanting to live don't really correspond with the way that we actually *do* live. So yes, I think that a lot of the things that I'm embracing on this record are very contemporary. It's painting a picture of something that's happened in the past, or might be a little bit make-believe and symbolic, but a lot of it is very, very now."

"Society has gone backwards. We're baboons"

TOBIAS ARGUES THAT HUMANITY IS FAILING TO PROGRESS PROPERLY

Thematically, *Prequelle* is an album that certainly speaks to us on many levels, but musically, too, it is a wonderfully layered album. Ghost have always coated their music's dark underbelly with a glistening sheen, but the swagger with which they have upped the ante on the latter is as startling as it is effective. Even aside from the pop-metal genius of *Rats*, where else in 2018 could you find a deliriously uptempo stadium rock banger like *Dance Macabre* rubbing shoulders with the downtuned, sinister riffery of *Faith*? Who else would twin the triumphant, quasi-religious anthemia of *See The Light* with the shamelessly 80s action montage leanings of *Miasma*, an instrumental that manages to pack in Maiden-esque twin harmonies, proggy swathes of symphonic shimmer, a guitar line straight out of *Beat It* and a fucking *saxophone* solo? It's the heavy metal musical you never knew you needed, and it's performed with knowing aplomb.

"What I've tried to do is make Ghost a little more Queen than AC/DC," offers

Papa 0: pray he doesn't start teaching Sunday school

THE DEVIL'S IN THE PREQUELLE

Our quick-fire track-by-track breakdown of Ghost's bonkers new album

ASHES
'Ring-a-ring o' roses/A pocket full of posies...' Foreboding strings hover over a sinister opening intro track. It's a deliciously devilish warm-up for...

RATS
Any fears that Ghost couldn't follow the immediacy of *Square Hammer* are allayed by this chugging humdinger, pinned together by a chorus so outrageously catchy and simple it'll plague you for months (see what we did there?).

FAITH
The heaviest song on the album, Sabbathian riffs are layered in silky guitar licks and some thunderous drum work. The only song on *Prequelle* that could fit on *Opus Eponymous*.

SEE THE LIGHT
A piano-driven power ballad with a chorus that could melt icebergs, this has Festival Anthem written all over it.

MIASMA
A stunning instrumental number that isn't so much an album track as a turbo-powered 80s action movie soundtrack condensed into five thrilling minutes. Oh, and there's a saxophone solo. What else would you expect?

DANCE MACABRE
Imagine Europe if they came from Transylvania instead of Sweden and you'll be some way to getting your head around this bouncy rock'n'roll rager.

PRO MEMORIA
Ghost's rock opera ambitions are fully realised on this haunting number that packs in guitars, pianos, organs and even a church bell. Impressive.

WITCH IMAGE
How is it possible for a lyric like *'While you sleep in Earthy delight/Someone's flesh is rotting tonight'* to exist in a song so upbeat you could drop it at a wedding party?!

HELVETESFONSTER
A bombastic instrumental that could have been cut from *Bat Out Of Hell* for being too OTT. It's ludicrous. We love it.

LIFE ETERNAL
'Is this the moment of just letting go?' A suitably epic grand finale to the greatest heavy metal musical never written. We're exhausted.

FRÉDÉRIC LECLERCQ (Dragonforce) · JOEY JORDISON (ex Slipknot) · ATTILA CSIHAR (Mayhem) · SEAN Z (Dääth) · HEIMOTH (Seth) · STEPHANE BURIEZ (Loudblast)

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The Cardinal demands you – yes, *you* – shake your tush

Tobias of the album's ambitious menagerie of sounds. "I don't mind a good rock banger at all, but I think that with Ghost, every song has to have its own, clear idea and structure. What I expanded on in *Infestissumam* and *Meliora* was that a Ghost song is not necessarily something that just starts with a big guitar intro. With Ghost, you can do pretty much anything." He pauses, before adding with an enthusiastic smile: "I'm a little rock opera with my music."

Of course, bringing his grandest vision to life isn't the only thing Tobias has had on his plate when it's come to all things Ghost recently. A little over a year ago, four former Nameless Ghouls launched a lawsuit against him, claiming that there had been an existing agreement that Ghost was to be a collaborative venture – an agreement which they allege Tobias broke when he began to assume more control of the band. Tobias responded by saying that no such agreement took place, and that any other roles in the band existed purely to "perform" and "execute" his ideas. For him, seeing the lawsuit play out in the public domain – a situation that accelerated his decision to 'unmask' – is something that has taken a little getting used to.

"I think what happened was a culmination of many years of misplaced confusion," he offers, diplomatically, as to why the lawsuit happened in the first place. "The fact that it took a life publicly was a little foreign to me, because for so many years, a lot of what I did and how I carried myself as an artist was done behind the scenes, and happily. In the end, though, it's just growing pains. That whole thing would never happen if things weren't going very well and Ghost had gone down the shits. I mean, Black Sabbath have been through litigation forever! I see it almost like an initiation rite. You're not a real artist until you've gone through your first lawsuit."

"You're not a real artist until you've had a lawsuit"

TOBIAS SAYS GETTING SUED BY HIS FORMER BANDMATES WAS A "GROWING PAIN"

As for officially revealing himself as the man behind Ghost, which he did in a special radio interview four months after the lawsuit was made public, he admits that it was always going to happen at some stage.

"At the end of the day, the idea of being 'anonymous' goes against modern lifestyle," he adds. "It's amazing that being anonymous worked for six years! I'm not as colourful as the characters I'm portraying, and that's why I created them; they were more interesting than I was. And I think that that will still be the winner in terms of public profile. I will never be able to outshine my characters, and I'm fine with that. I am quite happy not being the main visual aspect of the creation. I would like to take credit, in as much as I'm responsible for it happening, but I don't have to be the focal point. It's nice to have perks, but I don't have a burning desire to be famous."

Fame is rarely controlled by the people it embraces, but for Tobias Forge, it seems like he's found the perfect role in the play of his life. As long as his desire to create stays intact, so too will Ghost, and the fanfare around it will continue to grow. The vision is there. The music is, too. And judging by his hints on how Ghost Vol. 4 will work in the live domain – "there's gonna be nine people onstage, making noise in unison" – the next Ghost show will be the most spectacular yet. The only limit is his own imagination, and it's safe to say that there is plenty left in that tank yet.

"My goals always remain the same," he says matter-of-factly, as our time together comes to an end. "The plan has always been to turn Ghost into the show that I've always wanted it to become. I want to see it on a level where we can, on a day-to-day basis, perform in front of as many people as possible."

Ghost's greatest sermon is almost in session. The world is listening. ✠

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Acclaimed albums. Their biggest shows ever. Parkway Drive should be having the time of their lives. So why is *Reverence* filled with darkness? Winston McCall reveals their secret struggle

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICS: JOHN McMURTRIE

"WE WERE LIKE THE WALKING DEAD"

A BANDMEMBER'S PARTNER PASSED AWAY FROM CANCER WHILE THEY WERE TOURING

Winston McCall can't remember exactly when things got so dark, because they've been pitch black for a while now.

From the outside, the last few years have been a series of rolling victories for the Parkway Drive singer and his bandmates. Since the release of their game-changing fifth album, *Ire*, in 2015, the Australian band have muscled their way out of the metalcore ghetto and into the mainstream. *Ire* cracked the Top 30 in the UK and the US, and gave them a Number One hit back home. Their career upswing was capped with a stellar show at Brixton Academy last year.

But privately, things were very different. During that same timeframe, the band were battered by a string of agonising personal tragedies. Death has hovered constantly at their shoulder, casting a shadow over what should have been the most triumphant period of their lives.

Parkway have distilled those experiences into their new album, *Reverence*, a record that's angrier and bleaker than anything you'll hear this year. Its 10 tracks are the sound of a band screaming at an unforgiving universe, trying to make sense of everything they've endured.

"The last few years have been the most traumatic thing we've been through," says Winston. "It was just the most fucking vicious time of our lives."

It's early evening and we're sitting in London's Camden Underworld. The club is empty and eerily quiet. Winston is wrapped up in standard-issue Antipodean armour to keep out the cold British winter weather: gloves, scarf, woolly hat. Given the amount of shivering he's doing, it's not working.

Parkway return to the Underworld after a decade of bigger venues

As long as they still get that buzz from playing live, Parkway Drive will fight on

Parkway last played this venue in May 2008, six months after they released their second album, *Horizons*. His abiding memory of the gig is of a crowdsurfer kicking an air conditioning unit off the ceiling. "It was fucking crazy," he says.

The band are back at the Underworld tomorrow night for a low-key show, though 'low-key' applies to the size of the venue and the lack of pyrotechnics up onstage rather than the intensity in the room. And, given everything Parkway have been through, there's a lot of intensity to burn off.

Over the next 90 minutes, Winston will explain just what the band have been through together, and how it shaped *Reverence*. There are times when it's clearly tough for him. He pauses frequently to collect his thoughts. His voice cracks more than once.

"It's going to be hard, but I knew it was coming," he says of opening up about what the band have been through. "There has been loss. A lot of loss."

Reverence begins with the sound of cawing crows, traditionally the harbinger of death. It's an appropriate choice given the circumstances that surrounded the making of the album, and one that isn't coincidental.

In the summer of 2015, Parkway Drive were ready to unveil *Ire* on an unsuspecting world. It was a deviation from the metalcore blueprint they'd followed since their inception in Byron Bay in 2003, and they knew not everyone would come along for the ride. But they were buoyed by the sort of confidence a decade-long upwards trajectory gives a band. And anyway, they didn't give a damn what other people thought.

The band released *Vice Grip* as the first track from *Ire* in June 2015. Not long after, they played a show with Architects – a band the Australians had been close to since supporting them almost a decade earlier. It was then that Architects guitarist Tom Searle told them that he was battling cancer.

"We're like, 'What the fuck?'" says Winston. "But there's a constant thing of, 'That's fine, he'll get past it.'"

Stunned but hopeful, Parkway got on with the duties of promoting *Ire*. They played Australia, then the US. But at the end of their American tour, the band received more devastating news: one of their partners was diagnosed with cancer.

Winston's voice audibly cracks with emotion as he relates this. He pauses for several seconds to collect himself. "It was just horrible," he says quietly.

Winston won't disclose which bandmember it was, or the name of their partner, to protect their privacy, but it hit the whole band hard. Once again they dealt with it the only way they knew how: by throwing themselves into their work. "It was the same thing: we do what we have to do, as a band."

They carried on playing, pouring their frustration and confusion into their shows. In January 2016, Parkway Drive toured Europe with Architects in support. Halfway through, Tom was forced to drop out to go and have treatment. "You think, 'Fucking hell, this is serious,'" says Winston.

When the European tour finished, the band returned to Australia to give their battered psyches a break and attempt to make sense of the last few months. For Winston, it was a chance to spend time with his wife, their cat, and their bull terrier, Monty.

As the singer tells it, Monty was as close a friend as any human. Winston and his wife had rescued the dog a few years earlier, and Monty even sat in while the band demoed *Ire*. "He was fucking awesome," says Winston. "He was the scaredest little dog, but he'd protect us to the end."

It was while Winston was back in Australia that Monty was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. He becomes visibly emotional, struggling to fight back the tears as he tries to explain.

"They said, 'He's got two months to live,'" he says eventually. "And my family unit is my wife, my cat and my dog. It was like, 'Fucking hell, everything's happening.' Then two weeks later, he ran down to the gate and just lay down. He passed away while I was holding him." He pauses. "I had to dig that grave."

He takes a deep breath. It's hard enough dredging the reservoir of emotion associated with two cancer diagnoses and the death of his dog. But what's coming next is even harder.

Parkway Drive's Main Stage appearances at the Reading and Leeds festivals in August 2016 were supposed to be the high points of their year. They were already in Europe in the run-up to the shows, hammering the mainland festival circuit.

Then just under a week before they were due to arrive in the UK, they received the news they had been dreading: Tom Searle had passed away.

It hit Parkway Drive hard, but they battled through their grief. On August 27, they arrived at Reading for an intense mid-afternoon set. It was a victorious performance, fuelled by a mixture of anger and loss. But their triumph was punctured by more devastating news. The band woke up the morning after to the news that the bandmember's partner who had been diagnosed with cancer had passed away.

"That was fucked," says Winston. "We pulled out of Leeds. We were sitting there, going, 'What can we do? We could physically play, but there's no way we can stand up there…'" He trails off.

He won't go into specifics of the death, but the news understandably poleaxed the band. "We were like the walking dead. It hit us so massively. You're in the most isolated situation you can be in – you're a handful of people stuck on a bus while fucking shit goes as wrong as it can around you. And then at the same time you're stepping out onstage and going, 'Here

Winston McCall says shit has gone "as wrong as it can"

Parkway Drive (left to right): Jeff Ling, Jia O' Connor, Winston McCall, Ben Gordon, Luke Kilpatrick

we are!' to thousands of people in front of you. And that wasn't the end of it."

Since then, he says, there hasn't been a period when they haven't received a phone call to say a family member or friend has been diagnosed with cancer or has died from the disease. The last time it happened was a few days before they arrived in Europe for this promotional trip.

"You have a recovery period, then there's another thing that comes along," he says. "It's heartless to say, but it's now normal. I'm used to the grief process. How fucked is that? You've just got to sit there and reflect on who you're not going to see again, and think about the impact these people have had on your life. And you're still here," he adds, not bothering to keep the tang of irony from his voice. "Lucky you."

There are several startling moments on *Reverence*. The spoken-word intro to opening track *Wishing Wells* evokes Winston's great hero, Nick Cave, a comparison that prompts him to crack a grin. Then there's *Cemetery Bloom*, a slow-burning electronic goth song that's loaded with menace and imagery of death.

But the most startling moment is the album's final song, *The Colour Of Leaving*. Musically, it's stark and stripped down. Lyrically, it's an unvarnished howl at the futility of life and the unfairness of death. At one point in the song, Winston's voice begins to buckle and it sounds like he won't be able go on. It's tough to listen to. It must have been tougher to record.

"It's fucking blunt," he says. "I wrote half of that song after Monty passed away, and half after what was going on with Tom and that week of fucking hell. But I didn't know if I could actually perform it in whatever way."

In the end, he decided that he had to record it. The first time he spoke the words, he broke down. He managed just four takes of the song because it was so tough. The one on the album is the only one where he holds it together. "I'm laying it down as a marker," he says. "I'm saying, 'There has to be fucking something – you've taken everything from me, but I've got words. Fuck you for taking everything from me."

This defiant mood bled across the album. He insisted on performing *Wishing Wells* in the dark. "The lights are out, I'm taking my fucking shirt off, pulling at my face, fucking spit everywhere," he says. "It was pouring the frustration of everything we can't answer into song."

That frustration courses through *Reverence*, but Parkway have inverted it, refocusing it into a blazing anger. While several of the album's songs inevitably deal with their experiences of the last few years, others turn their rage outwards, taking furious aim at everything from the modern culture's constant need for shallow validation (*Prey*) to *I Hope You Rot*'s takedown of the child abuse scandal currently engulfing the Catholic church in Australia, partly inspired by a friend who experienced the horrors of institutionalised abuse.

"It's not, 'Fuck you, God; fuck you, religion' – believe in what you want, I don't mind," he says. "But if you're going to be a moral authority, if you're going to ask us to put a fucking pen on a Bible in a court of law, and then you have a legal loophole where the people who have been raped by your priests can't legally sue you, where you hide your wealth within our community, how else do you describe evil?"

The song's title, *I Hope You Rot*, doesn't pull any punches. He looks pissed off that it's even worth mentioning.

"No. Fuck it. Seriously, what the fuck else was I supposed to do?"

If Winston McCall has learned anything from the past few years, it's that everything matters and nothing matters.

"If there's ever been a time when your mortality is starkly placed in front of you, it's when a friend or family member who is perfectly fit, who is a wonderful human being, gets the clock handed to them," he says. "And there's no reason that you can grasp why it's happening. You try to find something to aim at."

Winston knows that *Reverence* will be just as divisive as *Ire* was, that the people who didn't come along for the ride back then aren't about to jump onboard here. He knows, and he doesn't give a fuck. He puts on an ironic whine.

"'Motherfuckers don't have breakdowns any more. Rest In Peace, Parkway, you're dead.' It's like, 'Whoa, shit went south quickly.' But you sit back and go, 'Fuck it, there's all that stuff and then there's what's real.' And this record's a reality check."

Reverence offers little in the way of optimism, meaning what few glimmers of light it does offer stand out all the more. *'And through it all, we wore the pain'*, rages Winston on one track, *In Blood*. *'We held our own / through the darkest of our nights.'"* It's hardly a party banger, but it does display a grim satisfaction that they're still here after all they've been through. It's a strange kind of victory but it's a victory nonetheless.

"I wrote it as a testament to the fact we've been able to survive," says the singer. "I was proud of the band, I was proud of what we made. I was proud that we made it."

Was there ever a chance that Parkway Drive might not have made it? That everything you went through might have ended the band?

"No, it brought us closer together," he says instantly. "I know these people. They're my fucking family. I've spent 15 years of my life with these people. We've seen some shit together. Not just what happened in the last few years, but right from the start. And there's no way we're giving up after all that."

There's still a long way to go, and some things are never going to be the same. But Parkway Drive are slowly walking back out into the light, one step at a time. ✠

"I'M PROUD OF THE BAND AND WHAT WE'VE MADE"

PARKWAY DRIVE SURVIVED PERSONAL SUFFERING TO RECORD *REVERENCE*

***REVERENCE* IS OUT MAY 4 VIA EPITAPH. PARKWAY DRIVE PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL IN JUNE**

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Winston McCall looks back on the high points of Parkway Drive's 15-year-career

2003: THE VERY FIRST GIG
"When we started, the only goal was that we got to do a gig at the Byron Bay Youth Centre. To get together enough songs that people mosh for the whole gig. And they did."

2005: RECORDING *KILLING WITH A SMILE* WITH ADAM D IN THE US
"Two-and-a-half weeks of madness, one day of vocals and our first defining step down a long road."

2006: THEIR DEBUT LONDON SHOW AT THE UNDERWORLD
"I think we opened for Evergreen Terrace. Underworld shows were crazy for us from the first time we played there – I don't think we've ever had a dull one."

2007: THE FIRST US TOUR
"Sleeping bags and starvation. We had so little funds. I bought 20 cobs of raw corn and ate it uncooked for three days straight while we waited to play another gig."

2009: DOWNLOAD DEBUT
"It blew our minds. It was literally the biggest mass of people we had ever seen and it was the first time we reassessed what might be possible for the band. I can't remember the gig, too much adrenaline."

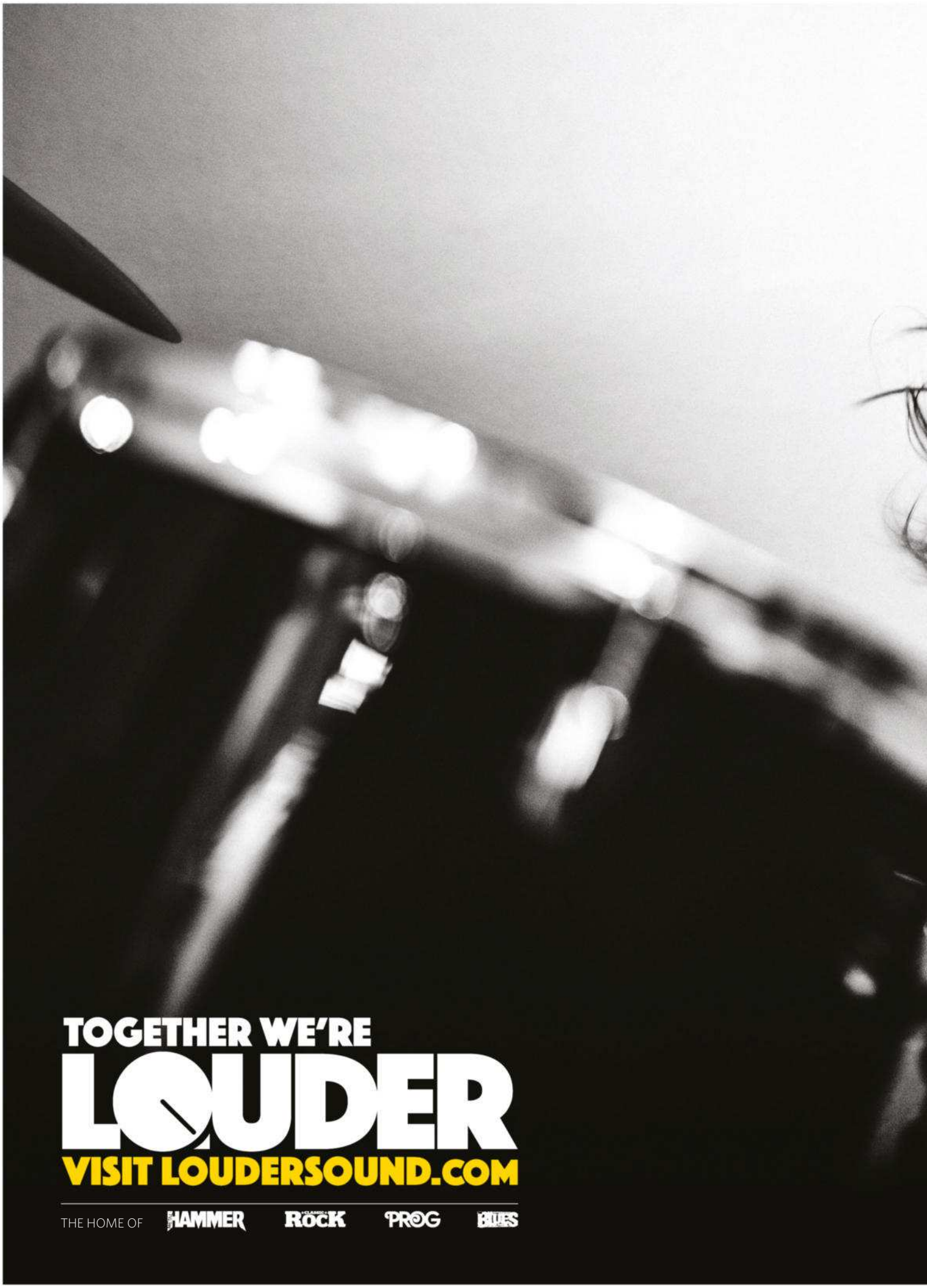
2010: WINNING AN ARIA AWARD FOR BEST HEAVY METAL ALBUM
"The first time the Australian record industry had to recognise how big the heavy music scene had become. Winning was nice; the fact that it got so big they had to create a new award for our community was better."

2012: SELLING OUT LONDON'S ROUNDHOUSE
"It was carnage from start to finish. It was the first time we brought fire to the UK and we got two blasts in before we had to shut it down, it was too crazy. If we could do The Roundhouse, then we could do anything."

2015: *IRE* HITS THE US AND UK TOP 30
"It was satisfying. After the stress of creation and the fact that we had to recreate ourselves on faith alone, it was amazing to see our faith in ourselves replicated so massively by old fans and new."

2017: BLOWING AWAY BRIXTON ACADEMY
"That was just mental. It was a big show, so we pulled out all the stops with the fire and the drumkit. Why not be ambitious?"

2018: HEADLINING DOWNLOAD FEST'S SECOND STAGE
"The prize now is to connect with as many people as possible, and give them as much in your life as you can. It's amazing to play it again. Would be want to headline the Main Stage? Give me the fucking shot and we will."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"THIS IS THE WEIRDEST PLACE ON EARTH"

JONATHAN COMPARES HIS HOMETOWN OF BAKERSFIELD TO A DAVID LYNCH MOVIE

Jonathan Davis still lives like a vampire. He prowls the hallways of his recording studio on the lonely edge of Bakersfield, California, obsessively making music and playing videogames deep into the night. "The later it gets, the more I come to life," the Korn singer says with a laugh. There's a trampoline and treadmill, Nerf guns and old DVDs of US country music variety show *Hee Haw* to pass the hours. And then every afternoon, he wakes just in time to pick up his boys from school.

He still calls the place Buck Owens Studios, named for the late country music star and 60s hit-maker whose Bakersfield Sound was a grittier alternative to the gloss of Nashville. Buck built this studio in an old movie theatre, where the marquee now sits empty and a metal gate bars neighbourhood speed freaks from the front door. Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash recorded here, and Jonathan's musician father ran the place for decades.

So when the frontman took it over in 2010, he decorated it with Korn's platinum records and vintage paintings of Buck in embroidered country-and-western finery. "I don't want to fuck with it. It's perfect," he says, black hair to his shoulders, a touch of grey in his beard. "The stains on the wall and everything about it has a vibe. I don't want it all slick and nice."

Just yesterday, Korn finished a week at the studio working on new music, and the place looks lived in. Ray Luzier's drumkit is still set up in the main room, where a basketball hoop stands tall beside a big-screen TV and scattered amps and guitars. These are good times for the band, preparing to follow up 2016's well-received *The Serenity Of Suffering*. "I'm trying to push them in a more groove-oriented way," says Jonathan excitedly, sitting at the computer where he spends hours each night labouring over his songs-in-progress. "I miss the head-bobbing. Where the heck did that go, dude? Everybody's getting that back: 'Fuck yeah!' We're all screaming and having fun like we're 21 again."

At just after 3pm, it's still a little early for Jonathan to be awake, but he's a friendly and chatty host this afternoon. He's more family man than party animal these days, entirely free from drink and drugs, or even the prescription 'Benzos' that used to keep his anxiety in check. In Bakersfield, Jonathan doesn't get out much, but does enjoy spotting the occasional 'tweaker' or skinhead standing beside a barrel fire or mowing his lawn in the middle of the night.

THE VAMPIRE OF BAKERSFIELD

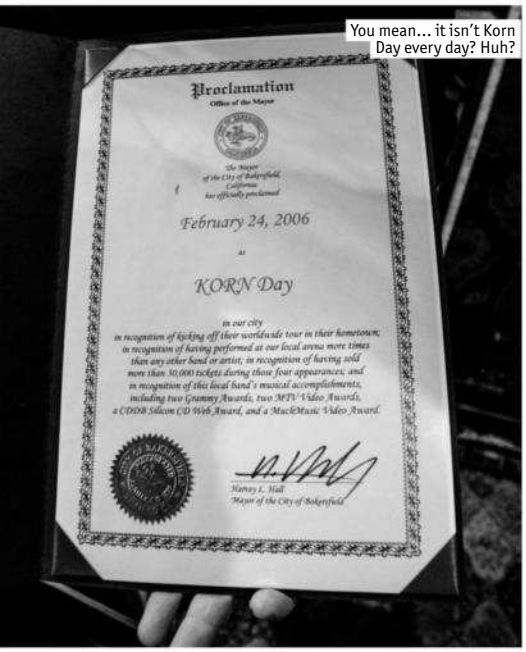
Vampire genius or awkward recluse? As he unveils his first solo album, we take a trip to Jonathan Davis's hometown studio for a captivating afternoon with the Korn legend

WORDS: STEVE APPLEFORD • PICTURES: BEN ZUCKER

"This is the weirdest place on Earth to me," he says with genuine affection. "It's like watching a David Lynch film."

But Jonathan is a vampire who now prefers to stay indoors, and can be found most days almost exclusively at the studio or at home with his family, including his sons Pirate, 13, and Zeppelin, 11, who was diagnosed with diabetes in 2014. His oldest son, Nathan, 22, is part of the electronic duo Hi I'm Ghost, who are signed to Firepower Records, and he looks like a younger clone of his dad in glasses and moustache, dressed head to toe in midnight black.

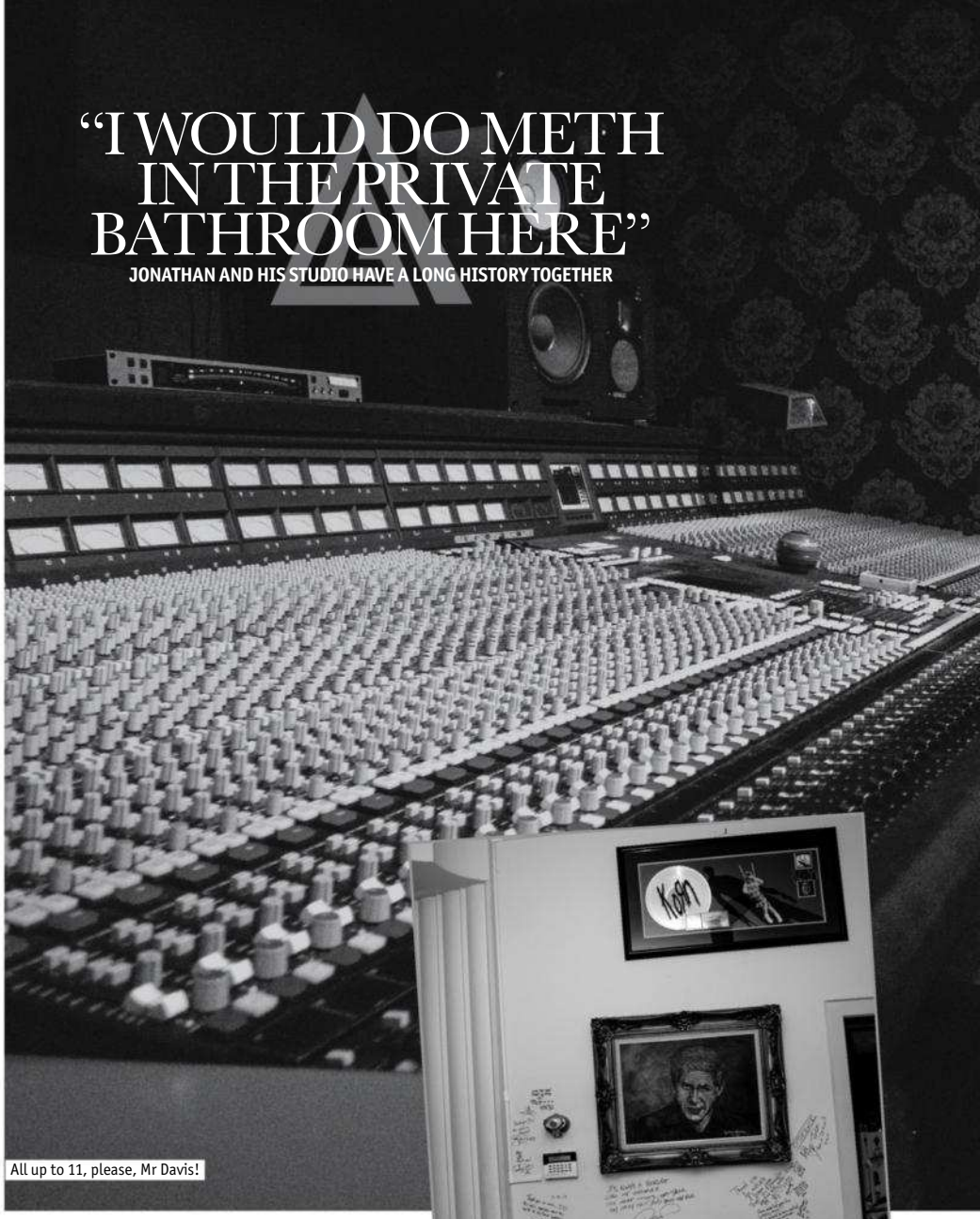
The *Queen Of The Damned* soundtrack featured Jonathan as the voice of the vampire Lestat



You mean... it isn't Korn Day every day? Huh?

"I WOULD DO METH IN THE PRIVATE BATHROOM HERE"

JONATHAN AND HIS STUDIO HAVE A LONG HISTORY TOGETHER


All up to 11, please, Mr Davis!

"I've got music and my family. They've got to co-exist together. One's not more important than the other," he insists. He then adds with a laugh, "If it was my son or music, I would choose my son! But there are sacrifices. I'm always gone and on the road."

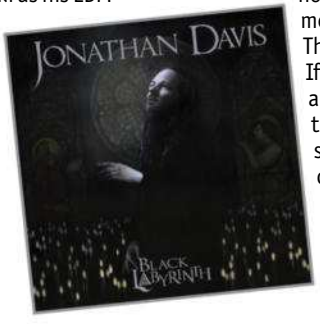
In a few weeks, Jonathan will be leaving the wife and kids behind as he embarks on a long-awaited side-step from Korn, hitting the road in connection with the release of his first true solo album, *Black Labyrinth*. He recorded 25 songs for the project over several years, then edited them down to a final 13, sounding less like Korn than a different brand of eclectic hard rock layered with tabla beats, violin and other acoustic instruments.

For him, it has been a chance to stretch out musically, not undermine the renewed momentum of his band. "If I want to do a Korn song, I'll do it with Korn!" he says. "I'm not going to write a Korn song on my solo shit. This is this side of me."

He first explored another side of his creative self on his 2002 movie soundtrack for *Queen Of The Damned*. The songs and orchestral score (recorded by a 110-piece orchestra) were written with Richard Gibbs for the Anne Rice vampire film and was his first ever project outside the band. It was inspired, he says now, by "just thinking of what would a fuckin' 600-year-old vampire's rock band sound like? It just came naturally to me."

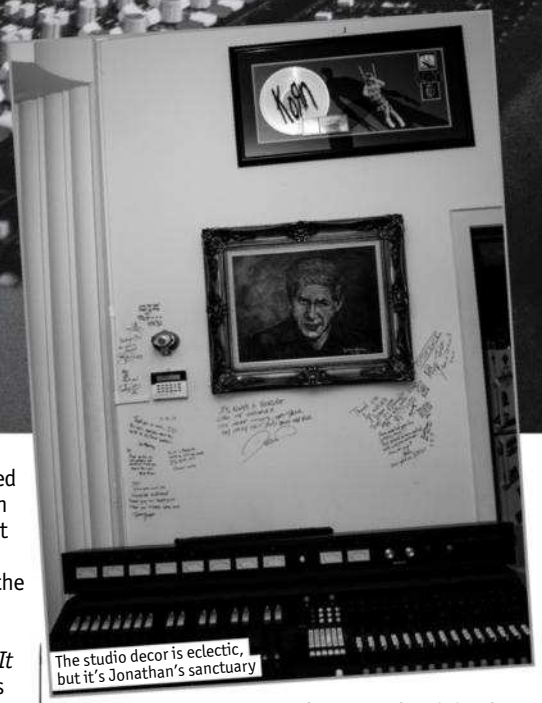
That project opened up a musical palate that he explored further on his next solo experiment, *Alone I Play*, a live performance recorded at the Woodshed Recorder studio in Malibu in 2007, followed by his first solo tour. He wore gangster pinstripes on that tour and left the bagpipes and tracksuit at home. It seemed like the beginning of a separate identity for the singer, and there were various side-projects along the way: guest vocals on tracks with Tech N9ne and Bone Thugs, remixing Rob Zombie and Steve Aoki as his EDM alter-ego JDevil, an album as part of a dubstep trio called Killbot.

But it took a full decade for his first studio solo album to come together. For many of those years, he was discouraged from pursuing it by Korn's former management and other concerned citizens. Even so, he worked on his own music anyway, privately building on what he began with *Alone I Play*. The songs that came from it were danceable and sweeping, world beats and 80s synths colliding, even as the lyrics remained obsessed with his eternal subjects of alienation and emotional conflict.



The first single from *Black Labyrinth* is *What It Is*, a melodrama of piano and slabs of guitar, as Jonathan rages: *'It may seem impossible / But I will embrace who I really am / If it's a son of a bitch or a terrified kid.'* Written originally for the film *American Satan*, the song is the album's most straight-ahead track, while the exotic and subversively pretty *Gender* bounces with tabla beats and lyrics inspired by the serial killer Buffalo Bill from *Silence Of The Lambs*: *'Can I wear your skin? Can I have it now?'*

Also on the album is *Medicate*, delivering some NIN-style intensity as Jonathan reflects on his days tweaked on Xanax: *'I can see my flaws plain as day.'* Of that time, Jonathan recalls now, "I was a slave to that medication, to keep me sane. The alternative was pure hell. If you've ever dealt with anxiety and panic, it's not fun. Then that leads to paranoia and schizophrenia and all kinds of fucked-up shit."



The studio decor is eclectic, but it's Jonathan's sanctuary

Last October, Jonathan joined the surviving members of Linkin Park to perform *One Step Closer* at a tribute concert to the late Chester Bennington at the Hollywood Bowl. Jonathan was as shocked as anyone by Chester's suicide, but recognised and identified with the depression that brought him down.

"We hung out a lot. He was an amazing kid. Depression is a motherfucker. I've been there," says Jonathan, who finally freed himself from the substances that scrambled his mind by entering rehab in Bakersfield in 2013.

"It was some ghetto-ass shit," he says of the scene. "I don't want to go to a fuckin' spa to get clean. I want to go to a prison because I don't ever want to go back! I need it to be traumatic and it was. No fuckin' TV. I was John Doe. They locked me in a room and I shit for a week and a half, kicked the Benzos."

In many ways, Bakersfield has been the answer for Jonathan, even if he's surprised that

"THEY LOCKED ME IN A ROOM AND I SHIT FOR A WEEK AND A HALF"

KICKING THE BENZOS WAS TRAUMATIC BUT NECESSARY FOR JONATHAN

of all the members of Korn, he's was the one who ended up returning. "I hated this place when I was younger," Jonathan admits. But he'd never quite felt at home in the big house he owned for four years in Malibu, and decided that the best place to raise his kids was around the farmers and oil workers he knew growing up.

As a young boy, he only occasionally visited Buck Owens Studios, but he remembers the first time: watching his dad at the piano recording some music, and Buck himself in his office. Upstairs now, Jonathan keeps an acoustic guitar given to him by Buck that is engraved with a message: 'If things don't work out with Korn, you can always pick and grin with me. Your friend, Buck Owens.'

Later on, Jonathan recorded vocals here for a few songs on Korn's 1994 debut, such as *Ball Tongue* and *Divine*. "It was cool to be doing something at my dad's studio," he remembers. "I was just happy to be doing a record. I could get good speed here. That was a plus. I would do meth in the private bathroom in the back. At the time, I was out of my mind."

The studio shut down in 2008 as business faded in the digital age, but Jonathan took over the following year and turned it into a private workshop. He says he has several projects in various stages of recording and planning. He's been talking to Marilyn Manson about coming up from Los Angeles to record an album of "dark vampire country" to lap steel and standup bass, "singing about dark shit".

This summer, the rest of Korn will return to continue work on the next album. "All the other bandmembers bought houses and all the toys. This is my stuff, where I put all my money in," he says, laughing again. "It isn't a good investment but it brings me joy. These are the tools of my trade. It's my sobriety, my everything." ✠

***BLACK LABYRINTH* IS OUT ON MAY 25 VIA SUMERIAN. JONATHAN PLAYS DOWNLOAD IN JUNE**

PHOTOS: BEN ZUCKER

ALONE I BREAK

Black Labyrinth isn't the first time Jonathan Davis has struck out on his own. We revisit the projects he's worked on outside Korn

***QUEEN OF THE DAMNED* SOUNDTRACK, 2002**

Collaborating with Richard Gibbs, Jonathan composed the orchestral score and songs for an onscreen band led by the vampire Lestat. In the film, Jonathan performs the bloodthirsty voice of Lestat, while contractual obligations meant the soundtrack album instead featured Marilyn Manson, Chester Bennington, Wayne Static and others.

***1STP KLOSR / ONE STEP CLOSER* WITH LINKIN PARK, 2002**

Linkin Park came late to the nu metal party, but Jonathan recognised these kindred rockers enough to sing on a hotwired take of the band's One Step Closer for their *Reanimation*. The remix had Jonathan howling anxiously to the epic rage of new friend Chester Bennington. Last October, Jonathan sang it at the Hollywood Bowl in tribute the late LP singer.

NEIL DIAMOND'S *LOVE ON THE ROCKS*, 2003

In 2003, Jonathan sang a snarling cover of Neil Diamond's heartbroken *Love On The Rocks* for the soundtrack of *Wonderland*. In the context of that film's real-life Hollywood swirl of drugs, murder and the bad vibes of a washed-up porn superstar, Jonathan's werewolf howl feels like a ray of sunshine.

***ALONE I PLAY*, 2007**

Ahead of his first tour as a solo artist, Jonathan gathered friends and fans at an intimate Malibu recording studio for a live gig of rearranged Korn hits and obscurities, plus music from *Queen Of The Damned*. He led a five-man band of acoustic, eclectic players, including virtuosic world violinist L. Shankar. It was released on CD and DVD as *Alone I Play*.

JDEVIL

Years before Korn, Jonathan was a teenage music obsessive spinning his fave dance and goth records as a DJ in Bakersfield. By 2009, he'd returned to that first love as JDevil, exploring spooky new dance sounds while opening for Manson and Korn. His EDM moonlighting led to Korn's 2011 collaboration with Skrillex and Jonathan's electronic trio, Killbot.

"I OWN A GUN."

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN QUIETLY INTERRUPTS US MID-SENTENCE, STARING POINTEDLY FROM BEHIND HIS ROUND GLASSES.

OH, OF COURSE, YOU WERE IN THE MILITARY, WE RESPOND.

HE NODS.

"A LOT OF PEOPLE FORGET THAT."

As A Perfect Circle bask in their first studio album in 14 years, *Hammer* sits down with Maynard James Keenan to talk guns, government and sexual politics. Strap yourself in…

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

Maynard James Keenan takes a political stance

"I own a gun."

Hammer was in the middle of asking Maynard James Keenan a question about *TalkTalk*, the latest single from A Perfect Circle – the band he and guitarist/songwriter Billy Howerdel formed in 2000. It appears to lambast crooked authority figures who offer *'thoughts and prayers'* after a tragedy but fail to take useful action (*'While you deliberate, bodies accumulate'*). Nine days after its release, those words took on a horribly prophetic character when 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz fatally shot 17 students at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The gun control debate ramped up and is dominating headlines as we chat inside a five-star London hotel.

In this context, it's tempting to read *TalkTalk* as an anti-firearms song. But as someone who got his first gun when he was 10 years old, growing up in smalltown Ohio, and is an ex-soldier and a hunter, Maynard's opinions on ownership are consistent with his background.

"I like guns. I'm good at shooting," he says, calmly. "I will teach my children the responsibility of these things – they are *absolutely* meant to kill something. If you get that through your head – if you've had a steak today, or a hamburger, or a chicken fillet – you'll understand. Life feeds on life, that's just what we do. I'm not going to go down the rabbit hole on my political beliefs on background checks, but there's some pretty obvious shit. You probably shouldn't give a gun to Charles Manson because it's his right to have one."

He flashes us a wry smile and leans forward in his chair.

New album *Eat The Elephant* is A Perfect Circle's first release in 14 years, and reflects some of society's seismic shifts as well as ongoing conflicts. Presidents have come and gone, with Trump now sitting in The White House, and the record is littered with references to corrupt gatekeepers. Meanwhile, social media has changed the way we communicate. *Disillusioned* urges us to get offline and reconnect with people.

Maynard is quick, though, to point out that he's always written about his sociopolitical views. *Judith*, from 2000's *Mer De Noms*, was not only about his mother's stroke, but a criticism of organised religion. Its follow-up, *Thirteenth Step* (2003), was about addiction, while last album *eMOTIVE* was a collection of anti-war covers released to coincide with the 2004 US election.

"They're about people politics," says Maynard. "A lot of times the demons that we're fighting aren't necessarily the ones we've been led to believe are across the aisle on Facebook. I feel like those demons are within us. You have to look at the positive and negative light of understanding a hammer, and what damage or constructive things a hammer can help you build. Information is a hammer. Understanding is a hammer. So as polarised as we've become, through social media, you have to understand that *that's* a hammer, and someone's using it to destroy connections between us – to divide and conquer."

Maynard repeatedly urges us to "follow the money" when trying to figure out *who's* dividing and conquering us, and why. Following our gun conversation, he points to big pharma as a major controlling force in the States and beyond.

"The largest donations going to the political parties in the US are *not* the NRA [National

Maynard James Keenan and Billy Howerdel. Would you vote for these men?

A Perfect Circle (left to right): Maynard James Keenan, Matt McJunkins, Billy Howerdel, James Iha, Jeff Friedl

Rifle Association], they are the pharmaceutical companies," he says. "We are now a nation of medicated people. We have antidepressants in our system that haven't really stood the test of time to see what effect these things have, and in many cases, when you have shootings, I'd say if you start tracking it, 99% of them are from people who are on or coming off some medication."

Have you personally had any experience of being on medication?

"No, but I've had friends who've gone through it, and I've watched them turn into these completely non-productive shells of human beings, and maybe all they needed – and this is just me being flippant – but maybe they needed a fucking spanking. Get outside of the world you're living in. Change your environment. I know that's a romantic notion, but digging holes and growing things changes you. When your very survival counts on putting food on your table, you are no longer concerned with what adjective you would like to be identified with."

"THE NATION IS MEDICATED"

BIG PHARMA HAS TOO MUCH POWER, SAYS MJK

That's a very political thing to say. If you're talking about gender, do you have any sympathy for people who feel like they were born in the wrong body, or want to identify as a certain gender?

"That's fine. But everybody else has to toe the line with them. You know what? Can we all just grab a broom, there's some sweeping to do. If you want to identify with an avocado, that's fine. I don't care. And if you're going to be mad about me not remembering you're an avocado, maybe forgive me? And we'll just fucking get this done?"

Maynard does not say this in a cruel way. He says it in a matter-of-fact way. Much like his ideas on gun ownership, they come from a disciplined Midwestern upbringing and the military; from the appreciation his father gave him for the land; and from working on the vineyards for his winemaking business in the last decade or so, away from the glare of fame – though not of privilege. He does not label himself, but he comes across as a libertarian.

Pharmaceutical companies do donate more than the NRA, because it's an entire industry compared with one interest group. Evidence for school shooters being influenced by medication is scant, though controversially the link between SSRI anti-depressants and murder was explored in a BBC *Panorama* documentary, and commentators have called for further investigation. Living in the thick of the Land Of The Free in one of its most tumultuous times, you can see how these thoughts have taken root.

When we ask whether he looks down on those who use social media, he diplomatically suggests there are better things they could be doing with their time – things that could foster social cohesion. "Put that fucking thing down and go work in a soup kitchen, go help start a community garden," he suggests. "People in power are always gonna be fighting with people in power. There's always gonna be a mess out there. If you understand how to talk to each other, at least you're a step ahead."

Making *Eat The Elephant* is part of his contribution ("it's just a seed, but if that somehow resonates in you a reason to build, or react, or move, that's great"), but his main focus is helping to revitalise Arizona's winemaking industry. He founded Caduceus Cellars in the mid-2000s, planting vines and working with other businesses. Since then, he says, the growth of economic impact on the state has been $3.3billion. He believes that if Arizona's approach to regulation was more relaxed, like California's, they could grow the industry further and pave the way for greater political influence.

"If we get the state of Arizona to understand, we could easily get over $7billion of economic impact for the state," he considers. "That money influences senators and congressmen. That money, when they start to mess around with bathroom bills and stupidity like that, we go, 'Fucking stop that,' and they do, so you start building a political base. From where? The money. Follow the money."

He also underlines the local impact of having vineyards; how it draws people closer and brings longterm benefits. "We just want people to reconnect. To truly understand that what we're doing is for our children, and really physically see it and touch it," he says. "There are collateral benefits that spiral off from that; touring bands are going to tasting rooms, and music actually starts to have more of a foothold. It's not just ➤

the local dude with his acoustic guitar now, it's a three-piece acoustic bluegrass band or a chamber quartet. Now they have more work around the state. The wider describer is that you're blurring social, economic, religious and political lines – even sexual lines. You just start to work with each other."

Our time with Maynard is almost over, but he wants to warn us that this feature will likely end up being butchered for clickbait, his quotes sensationalised online.

"This is going to be an experiment for you," he cautions. "We just talked about guns, about transgender people, we've talked about a multitude of subjects. You watch, now – as an example of a polarising agenda, this will come out and anything important we talked about will be overshadowed by a soundbite taken out of context."

It's difficult to know whether he's subtly threatening us to do a good job with the write-up, whether he derives pleasure or fascination from watching it all play out, or whether he's annoyed by the idea. We ask how he feels.

"PUT DOWN THAT FUCKING THING AND GO WORK IN A SOUP KITCHEN"

MAYNARD HAS NO TIME FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

"At the end of the day, it's not your magazine," he answers. "The people who are running the magazine are beholden to the people who make *money* off your magazine. If there's an incendiary tabloid-style headline in there to get them to pick it up and take it home, and go online and look at the taken-out-of-context article, that's what they want. So it'll be out of your hands."

He says it in that same measured voice, rather than aggressively. He's analysed the circumstances and made a frustrating prediction. It's clear he's comfortable with who he is, wears his principles like a badge of honour, and expects better of a world that doesn't match up to his standards.

"I know my intentions are good – my intentions are supportive and nurturing of my family, my community, my friends, those who appreciate the art we create. I'm impatient; I expect a lot because I *do* a lot," he admits. "My father taught me to be responsible for my actions and do the work. When I see people not paying attention and people that aren't compassionate, I get angry."

His views might split opinion, but he hopes *Eat The Elephant* will offer solace in these troubling times. "Hopefully somebody will have a better day listening to the record, and find a little bit of hope in this polarisation," he says. "You're never going to change your racist uncle, but the good news is, he's going to die soon. Show your nieces and nephews a better light."

***EAT THE ELEPHANT* IS OUT NOW VIA BMG. A PERFECT CIRCLE TOUR THE UK IN JUNE**

When Maynard talks about sociopolitical issues, he's not just blowing smoke

CIRCLE OF LIFE

How has the world changed between A Perfect Circle's last album *eMOTIVE* and new record *Eat The Elephant*? We find out...

	2004	2018
GLOBAL POPULATION	6.5 billion	7.6 billion
US PRESIDENT	Republican George W. Bush. He wins a second term in November 2004, defeating Democrat John Kerry.	Donald Trump. An investigation is underway into Russian interference in the election he won in 2016.
IN THE NEWS	NASA's Mars rover lands and transmits its first images. More than 300 people die after Chechen militants take 1,000 children, parents and staff hostage in a school gym. The Olympics take place in Athens, Greece. Ten new countries join the EU, bringing its membership to 25. Photos of US soldiers allegedly abusing Iraqi detainees in Abu Ghraib prison emerge. Bomb attacks on Madrid commuter trains kill 191 people.	SpaceX founder Elon Musk launches a Tesla car into space. Seventeen people die in a shooting at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High. The Winter Olympics take place in South Korea. Brexit negotiations get underway. Oxfam apologises to Haiti over claims of sexual misconduct by charity staff after the 2010 earthquake. Former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia are poisoned by a nerve agent.
SOCIAL MEDIA	Friends Reunited is a thing, quaintly putting people in touch with old schoolmates. Launched in 2003, MySpace expands rapidly, and duck face is born. Facebook launches, but only at elite US universities.	Facebook dominates, though is caught in a data-harvesting scandal. Twitter reflects and feeds into the news cycle. Instagram and SnapChat become the home of brands, influencers, filters and very cute dogs.

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"We have no more fucks to give"

Dimmu Borgir have spent two decades winding up black metal elitists. But has *Eonian*, their first album in eight years, seen them return to their extreme roots? Um, not quite. Shagrath and Silenoz explain all...

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

Dimmu Borgir (left to right): Daray, Silenoz, Shagrath, Galder, Gerlioz

The most commercially successful Norwegian black metal band of the lot, Dimmu Borgir have always aimed higher, thought bigger and sounded more overwhelmingly epic than any of their contemporaries. Even now, as they return from an eight-year gap between albums, founder members Shagrath (vocals) and Silenoz (guitars) are brimming with confidence and pride as they prepare to unleash their long-awaited 10th full-length, *Eonian*, while also being very much not bothered about what people might be saying about their prolonged absence from the scene.

"From the outside it probably looks like we haven't done shit for several years!" Shagrath laughs. "The last show we did was at Bloodstock in 2014, and then we made a decision to have a low profile and just concentrate on the new record, which we've been working on for many years."

"We've never been a band that can be in creative mode while we are on tour," adds Silenoz. "Because it requires so much of our attention, when we put songs together. So we did have a break in 2014 and we focused on other stuff, our families, other projects. Also, it was important this time to not have a deadline or have anyone push us in a certain direction. It was more about shutting off the world and digging deep into ourselves. After all this time, we know what we want..."

"...and we know what we *don't* want!" adds Shagrath, as they both burst into fits of laughter.

"We take pride in our heritage, from the early 90s that we sprouted from in the beginning," says Silenoz. "But we've always been an underdog on the sidelines and now we're getting so old that we have no more fucks to give!"

Although many noted metal musicians have passed through Dimmu Borgir's ranks – longtime bassist ICS Vortex and keyboardist Mustis left in 2009, in a significant a shake-up – the creative core of the band has long been Shagrath and Silenoz (with all respect to loyal second guitarist Galder, of course). Not surprisingly, for childhood friends who have spent the majority of their lives in close proximity, they have morphed into a highly effective double act; finishing each other's sentences, setting each other up for punchlines and generally bouncing off each other in the way that only the closest of friends do. Similarly, the songs on *Eonian* speak volumes about the creative harmony the Norwegians have jointly nurtured, while the album's title (which means, in essence, eternal or forever) feels like a subconscious nod to what both Shagrath and Silenoz regard as a neverending quest for artistic perfection.

"When you start a band, you're not certain about the direction you want to take it, but as time goes on you learn where you want to go and you become better at what you're doing," says Silenoz. "We've always had a really good work ethic and dynamic between us. We're very different as people, but we share the same view on the sacrifices you need to make to be in a band like this."

"WE SHUT OFF THE WORLD AND DUG DEEP"

DIMMU BORGIR ISOLATED THEMSELVES AND WORKED ON *EONIAN* FOR YEARS

Although very much a united front, Silenoz and Shagrath are noticeably distinct characters: the former is straightforward and thoughtful, the latter more acerbic and brash. It's clearly a formula that works.

"When you've been together for over 25 years, of course there are going to be arguments and disagreements and there's going to be miscommunication," Silenoz shrugs. "But at the end of the day, what we have in common is the love for the band, the love for the music..."

"...and the discipline! That's really important, too. But as you grow as an artist, you're closing in on the portal, basically," says Shagrath. "You know that the journey isn't going to be perfect, but you try to get as close as possible to that goal, working with whatever you have. That's not something you see when you're 18 and making your first album."

There is no denying that *Eonian* loudly proclaims its creators' meticulous attention to detail. Even by Dimmu's extraordinary standards, the new songs sound almost comically huge, as Silenoz's trademark spidery refrains and thunderous riffs underpin all manner of extravagance, from elegant orchestral flourishes to a full choir. While both one of the band's heaviest and most accessible records, it also seems to be their most thoughtful and complex, as Shagrath moves ever further away from the early black metal scene's myopic, dogmatic approach to lyrics. Instead, *Eonian* appears to draw from the frontman's own interest in Luciferian philosophy, wherein Lucifer is regarded as a guiding spirit and liberating force.

Shagrath: rebel rebel

"LUCIFER DIDN'T TAKE ANY SHIT – HE FOLLOWED HIS OWN LIGHT"

SHAGRATH EXPLAINS WHY THE FALLEN ANGEL IS CENTRAL TO THEIR ETHOS

"For me, when I write, it's important to be less and less conclusive these days," he notes. "In the past, it was much more about being straight and direct, but these days it's way more questioning. If you want to relate that to Luciferianism, that's what it's all about – to find your own light in all of this. I think it's important to say that we, as with many black metal or extreme bands, take pride in the Luciferian figure. He said, 'Fuck you, dad, I'm out of here! I'm not taking this shit anymore – I want to follow my own light and give that light to others…'"

"Musically speaking, this type of music is something you can dive into," adds Silenoz. "It's a world of its own, an escape from reality. I think that's needed now, more than ever, when you see what's going on around us."

Listening back to Dimmu Borgir's previous albums, you may wonder how they managed to keep upping the sonic ante with every next step. Certainly, *Eonian* upholds that fine tradition, with a production job (courtesy of Shagrath and Silenoz) that once again gleams with cutting-edge potency. But beyond the new record's impressive aesthetic values, it's the thrilling ingenuity of the songs themselves that marks Dimmu's 10th album out as potentially their finest yet. One notable change from earlier albums is that Shagrath appears to do a lot less screaming on *Eonian*: a simple decision, he insists, inspired by lessons learned.

"For me, it's all about the feeling you get from certain riffs. A song is like a journey and it would be absolutely no challenge if I just screamed my way through it. I looked back at some of the previous albums and what I learned was that sometimes there was too much singing! You have to pay attention to each sentence, each word, maybe change something small to make the whole thing more powerful, so it *means* more. It's a complex process, even before you start recording the vocals."

"I think Shagrath has become a lot more experienced in arranging the vocals and that makes the songs much stronger," Silenoz states. "One of the beauties of this band is that he plays keyboard and guitars and he's a songwriter, too. To have a vocalist say that he wants to step back from the vocals to make room for the music… well, you normally get the opposite situation! Ha ha!"

Twenty-three years after the release of their debut album, Norwegian black metal's greatest success story are 100% ready and prepared to launch their latest assault on the metal world. If the shows in support of *Eonian* reflect the album in any way, they will be eye-frazzling, hyper-gothic spectacles belched directly from hell's depths, the full six-man Dimmu live lineup firing on all infernal cylinders. Still aiming higher, thinking bigger and doing it all with more punch, pomp and power than anyone else, they are back at full strength and still in a class (and world) of their own.

"We're the type of band that never asks for permission," Shagrath avows. "We always do what we want to do, at any given time. I guess you could say we're some kind of rebels within the rebel community, so to speak, because we refuse to follow orders or unwritten rules. It's all or nothing for us."

"We've never made it easy for ourselves, put it that way," laughs Silenoz. "It all comes down to how you prepare. Sometimes you do think, 'Why didn't we just do this as a three-piece?', you know? It's like a circus on wheels."

"Yeah, that's true," Shagrath concludes. "Just with more animals!" ✠

***EONIAN* IS OUT ON MAY 4 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

FEAR THE VOICES

Dimmu Borgir aren't the only band to go big on choral vocals. Here are the other albums you need to hear

The Sisters Of Mercy

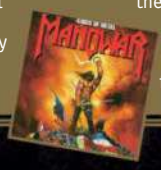
Floodland (WEA, 1987)

The Sisters were already dark rock heavyweights, but their second album torched the rule-book by cranking everything up to new levels of preposterous bombast. The key was smash hit single *This Corrosion*, which cost £50,000 to make and featured a 40-piece choir. You may struggle to find a black metal band that *weren't* influenced by it.

Manowar

Kings Of Metal (Atlantic, 1988)

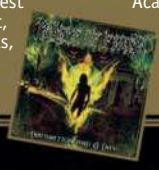
Always just a bit bigger, louder and over the top than everyone else, Manowar upped the ante with typical nonchalance on their sixth album. Featuring the resonant, silky tones of the Birmingham-based Canoldir Male Choir, songs like *Kingdom Come* might as well have been beamed directly down from the Ancient Gods.



Cradle Of Filth

Damnation And A Day (Sony, 2003)

As ambitious as ever, Dani Filth's crew approached their fifth album with big ideas brewing in the cauldron. The result was a sprawling, intricate concept piece, hugely bolstered by the involvement of the 40-piece Budapest Film Orchestra and the 32-piece Budapest Film Choir. That, ladies and gents, is called 'not fucking about'.



Behemoth

Demigod (Regain, 2004)

Given how intense and unrelenting Behemoth's music often is, it's amazing that an orchestra could find any space to manoeuvre. But Nergal's a canny chap, isn't he? Adding a dense layer of pomp and atmosphere to *Demigod*, the Academic Male Choir from the Polish city of Lublin deftly made their presence felt.

Helloween

Unarmed (SPV, 2009)

Marking their 25th anniversary by re-recording old classics, Helloween could have taken the easy route to creating *Unarmed*. Instead, they employed a powerful Gregorian choir to give the likes of *The Keeper's Trilogy* an extra vocal boost. Oh, and they hired the 70-piece Prague Symphony Orchestra, too.

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EARNING THEIR STRIPES

Good Tiger might just be the best band you've never heard of. Formed from some of tech metal's most beloved names, they're shaking off the past and clawing their way to the top

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: STEPHANIE CABRAL

Clusters of people chat animatedly and sip vodka cocktails infused with basil. Canapes of tomato flatbread and fish tacos are offered around. Tonight's host, celebrity chef Chris Santos, is doing laps of the room to make sure everyone is sufficiently fed and watered. But over in the corner, progressive metallers Good Tiger are lowering the tone with a story about their accommodation, and their founder/guitarist Derya 'Dez' Nagle.

"Our Airbnb is one of the tackiest places I've ever been to in my life," laughs mischievous guitarist Joaquin Ardiles. "There's a four-poster bed with three mattresses on top, and a weird walk-in shower in the middle of the room. Next to that shower is a mirror, and behind that mirror is a toilet. None of this is separated by walls. Dez bit the bullet and took a shit. I could see his feet under the mirror, clenching every now and then. He put on a bit of music so we couldn't hear it – *Rotten Apple*, by Alice In Chains. It was calming music, for a calming poo…"

Hammer is in the upstairs bar of Stanton Social, one of Chris's restaurants, in New York's trendy East Village – not the most obvious hangout spot for a bunch of heavy bands. We're here to celebrate the second anniversary of his record label, Blacklight Media, a subsidiary of the infamous Metal Blade, who signed Slayer and gave Metallica their break.

Good Tiger were Chris' first signings, but the deal marked a new beginning for the band, too, who were keen to leave behind very public learning experiences in their previous bands and djent OGs, The Safety Fire and Tesseract. These days they're down to earth, but it wasn't always the case.

"All of us are at a time in our lives where this isn't an ego-led expedition," says Dez. "We're here because we're playing music, and we just cut through all the usual kind of malarkey you have to go through in your younger years. The tried-and-test formula of people having to learn about themselves in front of people, essentially. Fortunately, we did that very quickly."

Elliot Coleman was working night shifts in a retail warehouse when Dez asked him to join Good Tiger. He had replaced Dan Tompkins in Tesseract in 2013, but struggled to sing the parts and was heavily criticised by their obsessive fans. Two years later, he and the band amicably parted ways via email and Dan returned.

"BEING IN TESSERACT WAS A REALITY CHECK. IT HUMBLED ME"

ELLIOT COLEMAN LEFT THE BAND FOLLOWING CRITICISM OF HIS LIVE VOCALS

Meanwhile, Elliot abandoned all thoughts of a career in music.

"I definitely had a reality check," he admits the next day, when we sit down to quiz the band backstage at New York's Gramercy Theater, where Blacklight are holding a birthday showcase gig. "I wasn't met with much acclaim at Tesseract, and when I look back on that era now, I'd say some of the criticism was probably accurate. It was my first real experience singing live; I was a studio vocalist before that, and it's kind of a whole different thing. I would say that it certainly humbled me."

Dez Nagle had spent more than a decade putting everything into progressive metallers The Safety Fire, releasing two critically acclaimed albums and touring with the likes of Periphery. But in late 2014, bassist Lori Peri decided to leave, forcing the other members to question

If Alex Rüdinger is a good boy, one day he'll be rewarded with a proper kit

Morgan Sinclair toured with the mighty Architects before joining Good Tiger

Elliot doesn't miss his old warehouse job one little bit

Good Tiger (left to right): Elliot Coleman, Alex Rüdinger, Morgan Sinclair, Dez Nagle, Joaquin Ardiles

their direction in life. Shortly after, singer Sean McWeeney and drummer Calvin Smith also quit. It was frustrating for Dez and guitarist Joaquin, who felt like they'd been on the cusp of something great.

"We still wanted to *do* music, because we were getting to a point with The Safety Fire where it felt like the next album was going to be a breakthrough," Dez remembers. "But we didn't want to replace the guys and continue under that name, because then you have the issues that Elliot found himself in with Tesseract. We thought it would be best to start something new."

Keen to be proactive – and fearful of having to get a conventional job – Dez started Good Tiger two weeks later and wrote 90% of the music himself. He already knew Elliot through industry connections (he had recommended him to Tesseract in the first place), and the line-up was completed by drummer Alex Rüdinger (ex-The Faceless) and bassist Morgan Sinclair (previously a touring guitarist with Architects). They put together their debut album, *A Head Full Of Moonlight*, without ever getting in a room together and crowdfunded it via Indiegogo, smashing their $1,600 target in just 18 hours. Blacklight came calling soon afterwards.

"There weren't any labels we felt offered us anything we couldn't do ourselves, but this was an interesting opportunity because there was no real history," offers Dez. "Blacklight Media was a fresh slate, and we weren't going in as a comparison to another band, but rather as a statement of intent for what they wanted to do."

Following months of touring and the release of their follow-up album, *We Will All Be Gone*, Good Tiger now feel like a proper band rather than a hastily assembled crew. For Dez, it's also been an opportunity to appreciate playing music for its own sake – he admits that his ego got in the way during The Safety Fire, and he was motivated by impressing others.

"I don't think I was looking for validation to be big, it was more like to my peers," he explains. "And I think in some ways, I *did* get that validation by going out with bands like Between The Buried And Me and Gojira, and them saying we were great. We toured with Protest The Hero and Jeff Loomis from Nevermore was supporting. Some guy from an amp manufacturer brought an amp down, and I was playing something, and Jeff went, 'You've got a really sick right hand, Dez.' I was like, 'Thanks Jeff!' But I look back at that and giggle."

These days, he's much more comfortable in his own skin, and happier playing music that isn't technically challenging for the sake of it. "I have a yearning to write a particular style of music right now, and I feel like I'm hitting a stride in my songwriting – I'm doing it purely out of that enjoyment," he explains. "If I woke up tomorrow and hated it, I wouldn't do it. Because everything that surrounds it, like notoriety, *is* actually meaningless."

Meanwhile, Elliot is ecstatic to have finally recorded his first and second full-length albums, with a bunch of people who have been in it together from day one. "With the situation I'm in now, it's nice to be in a band from the very beginning. To start from nothing, from scratch, rather than just joining something that's already going and has their own sound and identity," he explains. "My self-expression is 100% this band, rather than trying to be a budget version of whoever."

Elliot lets his hair down. Or up, as the case may be

"I WANTED NOTORIETY, BUT IT'S MEANINGLESS"

GUITARIST DEZ NAGLE HAD AN EGO WHEN HE WAS IN THE SAFETY FIRE

Elliot hangs out with Metal Blade legend Brian Slagel

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Good Tiger celebrate Blacklight's birthday. Needs more cake...

Meeting and greeting the fans

Tonight at the Gramercy Theater, Good Tiger are playing after garage-punk performance artists Mother Feather. Singer Ann Courtney obscenely sets the scene by repeatedly slapping her vagina, pouring water over her head and bawdily stalking the stage. Good Tiger have a different vibe, but no less energy. Elliot bounds onstage, suddenly springing to life like a wiry jack-in-the-box, and literally lets his hair down mid-song. Single *Grip Shoes* is a particular highlight, his voice soaring impressively across the 1930s venue.

Congregating afterwards in the downstairs bar/merch area, Good Tiger drink water and sign autographs. The band usually stay sober on tour, but Elliot is savouring a rare beer, confessing that the caffeine from a strong coffee had made him feel quite ill earlier, and he's relieved to have made it through the show. Though he's not an effusive man, or indeed a man of many words at all, he's genuinely sincere about the impact Good Tiger have had on his destiny. He is particularly grateful to Dez for bringing him salvation at a time he didn't realise he needed it.

"Honestly, I say it a lot and I mean it – he saved my life," Elliot reveals. "I don't know how *happy* I was working in the warehouse, but I was *content* with it – and that might actually be worse than knowing you're unhappy. I was making money and keeping in shape, but I was also isolated from everyone and didn't know if I had a creative bone in my body. I was onboard with the band straight away, and I knew that if at some point in the twilight of my career I would look back and be proud of one thing specifically, it would be this."

"I SAY IT A LOT AND I MEAN IT – DEZ SAVED MY LIFE"

ELLIOT HAD GIVEN UP ON HIS MUSICAL DREAMS WHEN GOOD TIGER CAME CALLING

Dez is clearly humbled by his words, and Good Tiger's achievements. "Obviously I really appreciate it. And I think similarly, as much as he feels that, I would feel the same way," he confesses, half to us and half to Elliot. "Without your involvement, who knows if the band would have continued. If I'd started having to *search* for people, I don't think I would have done it."

With the night kicking out and everyone decamping to the East Village for an aftershow at rock bar Pinks, we leave Good Tiger loading out their gear, trying to avoid parking fines and preparing to drive out of the city. It's not an easy life, but they couldn't be happier with their choice. ✠

Dez Nagle closes his eyes and tries to forget the memory of the Airbnb

GOOD TIGER'S *WE WILL ALL BE GONE* IS OUT NOW VIA BLACKLIGHT MEDIA. FOR MORE ON BLACKLIGHT, TURN TO PAGE 5 AND LISTEN TO YOUR COVERMOUNT CD.

INTO THE BLACK

He owns five restaurants and appears on US TV show *Chopped*... so why is celeb chef Chris Santos managing a label?

HOW DID YOU GET INTO HEAVY MUSIC?
"I grew up in a small town in Rhode Island, New England. On Saturdays, me and a couple of buddies would take the bus to Providence, the big city, and go to the record store. The new metal records were almost always on Metal Blade, so I was very in tune with who Brian Slagel was. Kerry King is a mutual friend, and he introduced us."

WHY DID YOU END UP STARTING BLACKLIGHT?
"A hobby of mine is to discover music. I go really deep, deep, deep into the internet and try to find stuff that I've never heard before – it's kind of like fishing. Brian suggested I do an imprint. I told him he was nuts and I didn't have time, but he said Metal Blade would do all the heavy lifting, so here we are."

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO GOOD TIGER?
"I'm looking for bands that have a unique sound, but always under the umbrella of heavy music. I think Good Tiger's incredibly creative, and Elliot's got a very unique voice. Metal is not what they seem built for to me, but then they create it and it's amazing."

ARE THERE ANY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN FOOD AND MUSIC?
"I think one of the similarities between music and going to a restaurant is that both are a performance for the guest, so you have to be creative. But once you've found your audience, you have to remember that as much as you're there for yourself, you're there for them as well."

IS BLACKLIGHT A HOBBY FOR YOU, OR MORE THAN THAT?
"It's a lifelong endeavour that I'm taking slowly. The label's two years old, and I feel like a two-year-old baby. I'm just learning how to walk. We have six bands signed and we're adding three a year at most. I didn't enter into this lightly. Metal Blade's been around for 35 years. If I live for another 35 years, I'd like to think Blacklight Media would be as big. That's the goal."

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Light In The Darkness

Losing parents, friends and a member of their own band, UK metallers Shields have confronted unimaginable amounts of pain. They tell *Hammer* how they've found the strength to move forwards

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN

Shields are no strangers to sadness. Guitarist Sam Kubrick lost his mother to cancer when he was just 15 years old, plunging him into grief and altering his worldview forever. Four years later, he documented the aftermath on aggressive song *I Just Feel Hate*.

"Most people would agree that losing a loved one puts a lot of life into perspective; I suddenly started caring way less about trivial things and everyday drama," explains Sam. "When it first happened, I was bitter, but not now. If anything, I'd like to think it made me a way more empathetic person than I might have otherwise been."

It's this combination of compassion and sorrow that runs through Shields' punishing tech metal, which explores the peaks and troughs of human experience. From addiction, to depression, to family issues, they confront desolation head on.

"Sadly, most people do go through some real dark shit, and our songs touch on a lot of relatable stuff," says Sam. "We want them to have a soul and a life, and they wouldn't have the same impact if we wrote about random crap."

Coming of age in the emo explosion, Sam identified with bands such as Panic! At The Disco and My Chemical Romance, before graduating to Parkway Drive and Slipknot, and then Periphery and Meshuggah. In friend and aspiring vocalist Joe Edwards, he found a likeminded collaborator, and they would spend hours writing songs in the practice rooms at their Hertfordshire high school. Moving up to music college in 2013, they recruited drummer Martin Huynh and decided to organise a show in London, using their savings and posing as a company called S&J Promotions (named after their initials). To their excitement, they managed to book local metallers Despite My Deepest Fear, We Die Tonight and Weather The Storm to play upstairs at Islington's Garage, and went on before them.

"We were old school about it because we weren't very familiar with Facebook or how to use online stuff, so we printed flyers and handed them out at gigs," Sam fondly recalls. "We were so excited. To us, these bands were humongous. We got to play in front of 100 people and, off the back of that, we carried on and accumulated more and more members."

Rounded out by guitarist George Christie and bassist Lawrence Welling, Shields went on to release 2013's self-titled EP and 2015's *Guilt* EP (with current drummer Alex Rayner replacing Martin). In February 2017, after a busy period of touring, they began recording debut full-length *Life In Exile*. Working with producer Christoph Wieczorek (previous tourmate and guitarist in German metalcore band Annisokay), they set up camp at Sam's grandmother's house – a large manor purchased by his late grandfather, filmmaker Stanley Kubrick.

"It's a beautiful house, and some of the rooms are big and echoy and boomy," Sam explains. "There's a library with a carpeted floor that had a really dead sound, with no reverb, that made it ideal for tracking in. Then there's a room with a snooker table, and we had the drumkit shoved up against it with mics underneath to get different sounds. It was an awesome experience."

Whereas *Guilt* was a relentlessly heavy listen, *Jordan* referencing a friend who died by suicide, lyricists Sam and Joe wanted *Life In Exile* to be "angry and uplifting at the same time". *Black Dog* and *Upside Down* are about trying to escape the iron grip of depression. *In The Grey* advocates battling addiction. *It's Killing Me*, written from the perspective of

Shields (left to right): Lawrence Welling, Sam Kubrick, Joe Edwards, Alex Rayner

a child, confronts helplessness. *Mother* revisits Sam's feelings about his teenage loss.

"That song is about a period of my life where I was not sleeping at all," Sam remembers. "I was never diagnosed, but I guess you could call it insomnia. I'm trying to parallel it with actually describing my mother dying. My lack of sleep and my mental health issues came from losing her. You have to listen to the lyrics, because it's bleakly honest about my situation and hers."

While this much brutal truth is hard to hear, there is that promised note of hope in the final song, *Aokigahara*. Named after the Japanese forest that has become a destination for people who plan to kill themselves, it's the fictional story of someone who resolves not to go through with it.

"The song is about a person who is trying to decide whether or not they want to die, but within the song he reaches the conclusion that it *is* worth living," explains Sam. "The last lyric is: *'We all die alone / so live your lives with the ones you love.'* No one needs to suffer alone, because someone always cares about you. There's a reason for everyone to stay alive, because of a very simple thing like love. After 12 songs that are all very bleak, that's where we end the album, which I think justifies the content."

Sam is hyper aware that suicide is never the answer, and is not only a tragic loss of life, but something that has a devastating impact on those left behind. Sadly, Shields had to face these consequences themselves in January, when guitarist George Christie took his own life.

"NO ONE NEEDS TO SUFFER ALONE"

SHIELDS GUITARIST SAM KUBRICK IS SPREADING A MESSAGE OF HOPE

The band issued a statement asking for privacy, and Sam still feels unable to talk about it publicly. He defers to drummer Alex when asked how it felt to play London's Koko in support of Escape The Fate, just nine days later.

"It was an intense experience that's hard to put into words," Alex begins. "It was one of the biggest shows we've ever played, yet it felt like we were the only ones there, and we allowed our emotions to take us through the set. We never felt losing George was going to affect our music and the path we were on. We weren't dealing with losing a guitarist, we were dealing with losing a friend. The pain we felt was and still is tremendous."

Keen to carry on with the band they've built from the ground up, Shields are readying themselves for months of touring *Life In Exile* while going through the grieving process. Their songs may gaze into the shadows but, with the help of their supporters and loved ones, they're holding firm to that vital message of hope.

"We have been trying our hardest to just put one foot in front of the other," Alex says. "This is still very raw for us, but having a constant stream of support is helping us no end. We can't thank everyone enough." ✠

SHIELDS' *LIFE IN EXILE* IS OUT NOW VIA LONG BRANCH.
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THE STORY OF THRASH PART 1

BORN OF FIRE

In the first of our special four-part story looking at the rise of thrash metal, we talk to the scene's original innovators about the birth of a legend

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

"If you ask me what the first thrash metal song was, it's *Exciter* by Judas Priest," reckons Gary Holt, who joined Exodus in 1981 after a crash course in riff-playing from the baby-faced quintet's co-founding guitarist, Kirk Hammett. Gary and Kirk were among the discerning headbangers worldwide whose turntables and boomboxes were dominated by the heaviest bands of the day: Priest, Motörhead, Iron Maiden and the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal multitudes. Simultaneously, US and UK punk scenes were being reinvigorated into hardcore by furious pioneers like Black Flag, Minor Threat, The Exploited and Discharge; here, in a petri dish, are the spores of thrash.

"It was all at once, y'know? I was discovering The Varukers at the same time as discovering Angel Witch," enthuses Gary. "It sunk into our brains, this mixture, the punk attitude and tempos with the technical ability and melody of these great metal bands. We stood on the backs of giants and rode their coattails!" he laughs. "We did our own thing, but it all starts somewhere." Unbeknownst to Exodus, other young Americans were getting similarly giddy about the new torrent of harder, faster metal appearing in record store import bins. In New York City, bushy-haired leather-boys Anthrax were desperate to impress Jonny Zazula, owner of the East Coast's coolest record stall: "We realised this is the guy we need to be involved with, he has his finger on the pulse of the music we love," explains Scott Ian, who co-founded Anthrax in 1981. "He was starting a label to put out new-school underground metal bands – thrash wasn't even a word yet – and we wanted to be part of that, so we were working as hard as we could." It worked: Zazula signed Anthrax to his new label, Megaforce, in 1983. By then he'd already snagged America's hottest new-school underground metal band, bumfluffed Los Angeles youths Metallica. "The first time we played with Metallica it was like looking into a mirror," recalls Gary. "We'd never heard any other bands doing the kind of stuff we were doing."

Metallica's rise to the top of the underground was swift. Bobby 'Blitz' Ellsworth was already fronting New Jersey hellions Overkill when he heard Metallica's 1982 *Live Metal Up Your Ass* demo, but this tape upped the ante. "All of a sudden this combination – of the metal that was coming out of the UK, and the punk scene from the USA – came together," enthuses Bobby. "It had angst, but it went [to] another place with regard to musicianship. You could see that the musical possibilities were endless." Metallica's fiery lead guitarist Dave Mustaine played a key role in that early impact. Dave's Metallicareer was infamously brief – sacked on the brink of stardom and replaced by Kirk from Exodus, he formed Megadeth as a vehicle for his avenging rage. But much of Metallica's early edge (and several killer riffs) came from Dave. "There was so much chemistry and combustion in the band," he reflects now. "It was a weird frickin' dynamic. We did argue and fight a lot, but I think that's because what we were doing was so... monumental, and we knew it. It put us in a spirit of invincibility."

Bay Area Native Chuck Billy was ➤

"METALLICA MADE SLAYER WANT TO GO MORE EXTREME"

METAL BLADE'S BRIAN SLAGEL ON THE RIVALRY BETWEEN TWO OF THRASH'S INNOVATORS

Anthrax in 1985. Their 1984 track *Metal Thrashing Mad* gave the genre its name

Metallica's James Hetfield onstage in 1984. "Metallica live were a revelation," says Testament's Chuck Billy

GETTY

After his shortlived Metallicareer, MegaDave declared war by forming Megadeth, pictured here in 1985

fronting melodic rockers Guilt when Metallica relocated to San Francisco; he soon joined local thrashers Legacy, just before their name changed to Testament. Although Chuck remembers Exodus's demo as "the spark that lit up the Bay Area", Metallica live were a revelation. "It was the energy that you didn't see at any other shows," gushes Chuck. "Once you saw Metallica at one of these small clubs, you knew there and then you were a fan. It all happened so quick, it was just BAM! here's our live show, here's a demo, here's a record, here's a movement. It grew so fast."

Thus inspired, nascent thrashers set about intensifying metal's blueprint. A disproportionate impact was made by Tyneside power trios: raucous diabolists Venom took Exodus and Slayer on their first US tours, while proto-speed loonies Raven took Metallica and Anthrax, and these formative influences weren't confined Stateside. "Venom was the final reason to form a band," asserts Tom Angelripper, then a coal miner in Germany's Ruhr Valley, who formed Sodom after hearing the Geordie hellraisers' seminal 1981 debut *Welcome To Hell*. "We could not believe how heavy a three-piece band could perform. We made the decision to make music that should sound heavier than Venom and faster than Metallica. That was our slogan!"

Mille Petrozza formed his first band in Essen, Germany in 1982 after witnessing Raven's fiery live show, becoming Kreator in 1984. "The thing that really connected from the punk attitude was the feeling that you can do anything: you can play three chords and make them sound huge," asserts Mille. All thrashers found space in their metal hearts for punk, and soon the traffic was two-way, as hardcore kids found themselves drawn to this violent twist on a genre they'd previously hated. US 'crossover' pioneers like Suicidal Tendencies, Corrosion Of Conformity, Verbal Abuse, D.R.I. and Cro-Mags – plus UK punk-metal hybrids Amebix, Onslaught, English Dogs and Sacrilege – added fuel to the fire, reaching an uproarious climax on Stormtroopers Of Death's magnificent piss-take, *Speak English Or Die*.

Boundaries of taste and velocity were smashed continuously from 1983-85, as increasingly brutal recordings emerged across the globe: Destruction, Holy Moses, Angel Dust and Living Death from Germany; Bathory from Sweden; Artillery from Denmark; Hellhammer/Celtic Frost from Switzerland; Sepultura from Brazil; Voivod, Sacrifice and Slaughter from Canada; Carnivore, Whiplash and Nuclear Assault from America's East Coast; Death Angel, Possessed, Hirax and Sadus from California. Each had their own warped take on the form, but arguably one band most powerfully motivated metal's rabid acceleration in this period: "Slayer were super-heavy and so fast, it was the most extreme thing I'd heard... There was simply nothing else like them," enthuses Brian Slagel, who formed Metal Blade Records in 1982, eagerly snagging Slayer soon after. "In LA at the time, the glammy image was everywhere. Bands like Mötley Crüe and Ratt, with their pop metal approach, were the hot ticket. This was totally going against what those bands were doing." Slayer provided the ravening spur, but also the stiffest competition for the emerging thrash scene; Brian remembers Metallica asking anxiously if Slayer's new record was faster than theirs. "I'm sure this rivalry inspired Slayer to get more and more extreme," adds Brian. "They were always looking to push the envelope."

"I TRADED TAPES WITH MAX FROM SEPULTURA"

KREATOR'S MILLE PETROZZA REMEMBERS THE CAMARADERIE IN THE SCENE

This one-upmanship in aggression seems a crucial impetus on thrash's rapid development. "Absolutely," affirms Mille. "Every one of the few bands around at that time, we all wanted to be heavier than the last Bathory or Venom record. We were trying hard, you know!" Many of these bands were in touch via the pre-Internet social network of smudged notepaper and home-dubbed C90s, as Mille fondly recalls: "My first tape-trading friends were Max from Sepultura, Katon from Hirax and the Possessed guys. I wasn't a real

GENE AMBO/ICONICPIX

Slayer's Kerry King in 1985. "There was simply nothing else like them," says Brian Slagel

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THE STORY OF THRASH PART 1

KEVIN HODAPP / FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY

Slayer and Megadeth having a nice, quiet get-together backstage at Brooklyn, NY's L'Amour in 1984

Overkill, pictured here in 1984. Frontman Bobby says Metallica's demo upped the ante

collector, so we recorded our rehearsal just so we could send these people some music! The scene in Essen was very small, there was nowhere to play, plus we didn't feel ready. So we didn't record a demo to get gigs, we sent our tape off in return for Mercyful Fate live at the Dynamo."

"WE DROVE SEVEN HOURS NORTH TO SEE VOIVOD AND CELTIC FROST"

OVERKILL'S BOBBY BLITZ HAD SEEN THEM IN FANZINES AND HAD TO CHECK THEM OUT

"It was huge," affirms Bobby Blitz of the mid-80s TDK-in-a-jiffy-bag revolution. "I guess it was primitive filesharing. Happening simultaneously were these little rags done on Xerox machines, with personal sections where you could trade demos with penpals. The only new car I ever bought in my life was in 1984. [Overkill bassist] DD Verni and I filled it with beer and went from New Jersey to Montreal to see Voivod, Celtic Frost and Destruction, at their first North American thrash festival. We were aware of these guys through fanzines and tape-trading, so we drove seven hours north because we loved this stuff. It wasn't about convenience, but it was worth travelling for!"

By 1985, Earth was in the grip of a violent metal revolution. Critical first albums emerged by Megadeth, Kreator, Overkill, Possessed, Destruction, Dark Angel, Watchtower, Agent Steel, and arguably thrash's greatest debut: Exodus's *Bonded By Blood*. "I think it's better than all the others," affirms Gary Holt, "and the others are fucking great! I've been trying to follow it up my whole life, and I can't, no matter how good a record I make!"

Despite these triumphs, thrash was a resolutely underdog genre, mocked and misunderstood by the wider rock world, but it was rising fast, and a hierarchy of world-class trailblazers was emerging. "We went from nobody knowing who we were, to basically touring the world," says Scott Ian of the year Anthrax released *Spreading The Disease*, the title a handy metaphor for the global proliferation of this electrifying new music as it entered its watershed year, 1986... ✠

FRANK WHITE

Exodus onstage at L'Amour in 1985. Testament's Chuck Billy remembers their demo as "the spark that lit up the Bay Area"

CATCH PART 2 OF THE STORY OF THRASH IN NEXT MONTH'S *METAL HAMMER*, ON SALE MAY 24

THRASH HITS: SIDE ONE ('83-'85)

Ten of the era's most essential tracks

METALLICA
Metal Militia
(Kill 'Em All, 1983)
Debuting on 1982's *No Life 'Til Leather* demo, this shredding call-to-arms was written by Hetfield/Mustaine/Ulrich, a breathtaking creative team fatally overloaded with volatile genius.

SUICIDAL TENDENCIES
I Saw Your Mommy
(Suicidal Tendencies, 1983)
Breaking new ground with this collision of swaggering punk, frantic thrash and brutal gore lyrics, Suicidal were uniting warring forces in California's tribal wasteland.

ANTHRAX
Metal Thrashing Mad
(Fistful Of Metal, 1984)
The NYC rhythm kings' most enduring anthem, the infectious *Metal Thrashing Mad* inspired the name of the entire movement.

SLAYER
Chemical Warfare
(Haunting The Chapel, 1984)
More intense and complex than their debut, with this raging EP opener – now an encore staple – Slayer set new standards in full-force brutality.

DESTRUCTION
Mad Butcher
(Sentence Of Death, 1984)
Originally opening the Teutonic trio's first demo, re-recorded for a 1987 A-side, *Mad Butcher* encapsulates the frenzied, pulverising blur of early German thrash.

EXODUS
Bonded By Blood
(Bonded By Blood, 1985)
Already a set opener by 1983, this archetypal Bay Area banger is a rallying cry for Exodus's committed legion of thrashers.

KREATOR
Tormentor
(Endless Pain, 1985)
It's almost a rite of passage for thrash bands to write a song called Tormentor, but Kreator's *Tormentor* is even more viciously tormenting than Slayer or Destruction's *Tormentor*.

OVERKILL
Rotten To The Core
(Feel The Fire, 1985)
Overkill knew they'd aced it when this riff arrived, banging punk and NWOBHM heads together to create its own manic energy and defiant attitude.

CELTIC FROST
Circle Of The Tyrants
(To Mega Therion, 1985)
Sludgy doom riffing, operatic female vocals, devastating tempo changes; this Swiss trio burst out of left-field with a set of game-changing innovations for thrash, death and black metal.

MEGADETH
Rattlehead
(Killing Is My Business..., 1985)
'It's time for snapping some necks/ Slashing, thrashing to Megadeth!'
Megadave's earliest singalong anthem is a full-throttle love song to headbanging, powered by rattling jazz-thrash drums and wizardly solos.

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CHURCH of NOISE

Come worship at the altar of Seven Spires, the symphonic metallers with a love of the theatrical, who are determined to make it big

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • LIVE IMAGE: DEREK BREMNER

When *Metal Hammer* first glimpsed Seven Spires on this year's 70,000 Tons Of Metal cruise, it was immediately apparent that they were a band with extraordinary potential. Fronted by the frankly ludicrous vocal talents of Adrienne Cowan, the Boston-based symphonic metal quartet blew the audience away with their rabid enthusiasm, their singer providing a startling, charismatic focal point. Some people are simply destined to be megastars.

"I always knew that I was going to be a performer," Adrienne tells us. "Except when I was a very little kid and I wanted to be either a palaeontologist or an astronaut, ha ha! For the longest time I thought I'd go into theatre, and I was obsessed with being on Broadway or in the West End in London, but I realised that I hated acting and I'm a horrible dancer. So I leaned more towards metal and it's the same as theatre, just with more fire and double kick-drums and more people like me!"

Not content with fronting Seven Spires, Adrienne also plays keyboards for US metalcore stalwarts Winds Of Plague *and* sings with Boston power metallers FirstBourne. Quite how she manages to find the time for it all is anyone's guess, but it's plain that Seven Spires is Adrienne's most significant labour of love and a project she has nurtured from the ground up.

"I started writing a couple of the songs when I was still living in England a few years ago," she recalls. "I was studying at the Academy Of Contemporary Music in London for six years, and then at the end of my studies I moved to America to go to Berklee [College Of Music, Boston]. I continued to write songs and then in my first week I met my guitar player Jack [Kosto] in a bookstore. I was standing behind him in line, I think Def Leppard was playing and I was wearing a Nightwish shirt… everything just clicked!"

Five years on from their spontaneous formation, Seven Spires sound very much the finished article on last year's debut album, *Solveig*. Although firmly rooted in symphonic metal, the band's sound is way edgier and more aggressive than the vast majority of their peers'. Meanwhile, Adrienne's vocal abilities and multi-octave range are simply mind-boggling, as she switches from soaring melodies to feral screams with great precision. Given how phenomenally popular symphonic metal is right now, not least in Europe, Seven Spires could hardly be better placed to be the genre's next big thing, even though Adrienne insists that the 'symphonic' tag is not as clearly defined as some may believe.

"WE WANT EVERYTHING"

AND VOCALIST ADRIENNE COWAN IS WELL ON HER WAY TO GETTING IT

"Technically, what we do is symphonic metal, for sure, but it's such a wide umbrella," she notes. "You have more extreme bands like [Dutch black metal crew] Carach Angren and they're undoubtedly symphonic, so it's not just Nightwish and Epica, you know? I always just wanted this band to sound dark and powerful, and it didn't really matter which medium we used to get that across, as long as it was honest. This is just the most honest expression of my artistic self…if that doesn't sound too pompous, ha ha ha!"

A concept album that tells the tale of "a lost soul and his journey through a Demon's sunless neo-Victorian underworld", *Solveig* is a debut album with more depth than most. It reaches a tear-jerking climax with *Ashes*, a song that has become Seven Spires' routine set-closer and one that Adrienne holds particularly close to her heart.

"*Ashes* is both a literal and metaphorical song about rising out of something terrible, something that burned you away on the inside. In the story of the album, the entire underworld is incinerated as a sacrifice, hence the title. But it's also about rising out of difficult times. Yeah, it does relate to me directly but I'm generally horrible about discussing my feelings. My band will confirm that! The stereotypical asshole might think I'm just writing about ex-boyfriends or whatever, I guess, but it's obviously much deeper than that. We're very proud of that song."

Not just a multi-band workaholic but also increasingly in demand as a vocal tutor and musical arranger, Adrienne clearly has energy levels that put most of us to shame (even though she attributes much of her energy to extreme coffee consumption). As the metal world continues to discuss matters of gender equality and inclusion, fearless figures like Adrienne are integral to our ongoing positive progress as a subculture, even if there is still much work to be done.

"I don't want to say things have improved because it wasn't so bad before, but in the past I'd turn up at a venue with a bass guitar and some guy would say, 'Oh sweetheart, are you gonna play that all by yourself?' It was horrible. I was insulted, but also… fuck you! But in the last few years, people have been a lot less objectifying, which is surprising. You still get some really gross people on YouTube, so I don't read the comments anymore, but overall I've seen a lot more respect. I'm treated like an actual person and an artist… rather than [exaggerated posh voice] *a sexy lady*, ha ha!"

Already hard at work on album number two, Seven Spires have the wind in their sails and it's not hard to imagine them becoming inordinately huge over the next 12 months. It certainly won't harm their prospects that their singer is a bona fide force of nature with nothing but world domination on her mind.

"All we want is *everything*, you know?" she grins. "We're working extremely hard. I think that should be every band's goal, to be up there with Epica and Nightwish or whoever it is. You have to be working towards that from the beginning. That's all I want. My number one goal in life is to be a rock star! It's not enough to just make a living. That's 80% of the goal, and the other 20% is all about making that magic happen."

***SOLVEIG* IS OUT NOW VIA BLACK RAY MUSIC GROUP**

Adrienne is a powerhouse and plays in *three* bands

Seven Spires: Boston-based, but headed for the world stage

WHY OUR VENUES ARE STILL IN DANGER

In 2016, *Hammer* launched an investigation into the decline of the UK's music venues. While progress is being made, there's still a long way to go to save our scene

WORDS: THEA DE GALLIER

Baroness at Bristol's The Fleece, August 2012

Gorgoroth at The Fleece, December 2015

"We did a social media post asking about the state of the nation and we identified 20 places under threat, including King Tut's and the 100 Club," says Mark Davyd, founder and CEO of charity the Music Venues Trust. "Those places are important to everyone in the industry. Iron Maiden came out of a pub in East London! Where would they have played if those places weren't there?"

Almost two years ago, *Hammer* went on a mission to find out what the landscape was *really* like for small venues in the UK. Alarming reports about strings of venues closing down painted a bleak picture for the DIY live circuit; in 2016, reports showed that London had lost 40% in a decade, with more closing around the rest of the UK.

We found a multitude of problems facing venues, including rising rents and gentrification, noise complaints, a lack of aid from the Arts Council England (it rejected an application for funding made by Music Venues Trust last July), and a disjointed network of venues, where promoters and owners didn't know where to turn for support and advice, or how best to band together and support each other.

At the time, Mark Davyd told us he was in the process of securing funding from various organisations to be injected back into the UK's venues, and pushing for the Government to introduce the Agent Of Change principle, which aims to safeguard venues from closure due to noise complaints by putting the onus on residential developers to adequately soundproof any accommodation built near a venue. On those fronts, the MVT has had success.

"Agent Of Change will be enacted in English law this year," says Mark. "Instead of the current law, which is heavily weighted in favour of planners and developers, it will be weighted more in favour of the venues, and developers will have to pay much more attention to them. The Scottish and Welsh governments have announced they're going to do the same thing."

Agent Of Change hasn't formally been passed as a law yet, but the bill was read in the House Of Commons on January 10, and its second reading is on May 11. It's a big step forward from where it was last time we spoke to Mark – back then, Agent Of Change was still a grassroots petition.

Mark also secured a donation from Sony Music towards the MVT's Emergency Response service, which offers practical advice from experts to venues facing closure. Money for the service was also raised through the Fightback concert in October 2016, which was held at London's Roundhouse, and more fundraising gigs under the Fightback banner were held in February, in small venues in Milton Keynes, Bradford, Blackpool and Stoke-on-Trent. Other venues working with the MVT are being encouraged to hold their own Fightback gigs throughout the year – the campaign also kicks back at exclusivity clauses imposed by corporate promoters.

"WHERE WOULD IRON MAIDEN HAVE PLAYED?"

WITHOUT LOCAL EAST LONDON VENUES, THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE SURVIVED

"I understand why big promoters like Live Nation and AEG want exclusivity on touring bands – they want to sell tickets to their venues in the places they have them," says Mark. "What we're doing with Fightback is encouraging those bands to play one more show, in a small venue in a different town or city. It's not a big ask."

The MVT, alongside other industry bodies like the Association Of Independent Festivals, has also lobbied the PRS to review its licensing tariffs (the royalties venues have to pay any time a song by a PRS-registered artist is played live), and the proposed changes are currently being reviewed by the Copyright Tribunal – the first time such a review has taken place since 1988.

Progress is steady, but venues are still closing. Bristol's Bierkeller – which hosted Nirvana's first UK headline gig in 1991 – shut suddenly in February, with the venue blaming the building's owners. "The owners of the building we are housed in have decided to redevelop the whole site, and sorry to say we are not part of their plans," they wrote on Facebook. But the developers, Resolution Property, hit back, saying they'd initially planned to keep the Bierkeller open. The venue, they said, had fallen behind on their rent, and "were not in a position to renew their lease when it expired", according to the *Bristol Post*. Dave Brayley, the former promoter, told *Hammer* that "I'm not allowed to say much… the landlord and tenant are in dispute so that needs to be legally sorted. I can say the closure was not really anything to do with any trend in struggling venues, it was more of a lack of financial investment that led to problems."

There are a number of reasons venues may fall behind on their rent. Mark explains that business rates can be prohibitive to keeping venues open. "The Fleece in Bristol got a 404% increase in its rates, at the same time as the government saying it wants to stop the closure of music venues, which makes no sense," he says. "Things like gentrification, that cause music venues to close, will all be centred around the Agent Of Change concept but I feel it's not going to be enough. We need a massive review of premises' licenses in this sector, and better direction to local authorities on the use of the Licensing Act, which often gives venues conditions that they can't comply with or are very expensive."

Dean McMullen, who used to promote at Peckham's Montague Arms and also plays guitar in Muncie Girls, says financial struggles were the main reason it closed in February.

BIA(M)=ADAM GASSON/GORECHOPPER; DUNCAN AVERSON/HECK; 2017 SESSIONS/GETTY

"IN LEICESTER, THERE'S COLLABORATION INSTEAD OF COMPETITION"

PROMOTER JOHN HELPS SAYS COMMUNITY SPIRIT IS KEEPING VENUES ALIVE

Dean McMullen, who used to promote at Montague Arms, Peckham

"What killed it in the end was a rent review," he says. "In the whole of this area the rents are going up. We could barely afford it anyway, so we had to move out, and the company that owned the building had someone lined up already [to buy it]. It felt like we were pushed out to make way for the new owner. But it also struggled in general; it's so hard for music venues to cover their costs as they're so high. People don't tend to buy that many drinks and venues rely solely on the bar."

He says that raising drinks prices might seem like the obvious solution, but that in itself brings more problems. "Then people end up not buying so many drinks, and drinking cans outside, [which can see the venue accused of] bringing binge drinking to the area. That brings even more problems to the venue."

Relying on the bar was something that Alex Martindale took into account when he stepped in to save The Napier in Blackburn. "The important thing is that the music venue side of the business is separate from the bar side of the business. It means your music venue isn't measured on the success on the bar," he says. That doesn't just mean relying on ticket sales – it could be anything from hiring out the venue, to diversifying the kind of events it holds, or making the backline equipment (if it's in-house) available for hire.

The Napier, which Alex describes as the heart of Blackburn's alternative community, closed in June 2016, and, thanks to Alex's efforts, reopened that September as the first community-owned rock venue in the UK. He called a meeting, and brought together a team willing to take on the lease of the pub. With help from Co-operative And Mutual Solutions, a company offering advice and consultancy to social enterprises, they found out how they could nominate the building as an asset of community value. After talks with their local MP and the brewery who owned the building, they were successful, and began fundraising to take over the lease.

"We identified a grant scheme called More Than A Pub [a government-funded scheme offered by the Plunkett Foundation, a charity helping build community co-ops] and got about £16,000 from them. We raised £20,000 through investments – we offered five-year bonds to people investing – and almost £6,000 from crowdfunding."

Crowdfunding was the central tenet of a number of news pieces about the pub's reopening, offering it as a solution to Britain's ailing venues. But Alex says it wasn't just about the money. "Most importantly it was about building up a mailing list of people we knew were willing to put their hand in their pocket.

Black Peaks at The Fleece, September 2016

Heck get acquainted with a local crowd

Fear Factory at Bristol Bierkeller, which suddenly closed in February

DEAN MCMULLEN: PHIL DANDALL / BLACK PEAKS, HECK: JOBY SESSIONS / FEAR FACTORY: DUNCAN EVERSON

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Fewer regional venues means fewer lovely times for all

Corrosion Of Conformity, Bristol Bierkeller, March 2015

It was about engaging with people who wanted to support," he says.

Everyone involved in the cause to save venues agrees community support is vital. Mark organises the yearly Venues Day, which brings venue owners from around the country together to discuss the problems they face and point them in the direction of people and organisations that can help. John Helps, who we also spoke to in the previous feature, used to promote at Leicester's Firebug, and says the city has been successful in keeping its venues afloat thanks to the camaraderie between promoters.

"There doesn't seem to be any indication that any of the venues are about to close," he says. "We've just had Dryden Street Social open, which is a new, bigger venue in the city centre. Generally things seem pretty healthy – perhaps even stronger than they've been for a long time. The collaboration between venues that would perhaps normally be in competition – I find that really nice about Leicester."

Thanks to that collaboration, Leicester – which was, John says, historically overlooked on the national touring circuit in favour of Nottingham or Birmingham – managed to put itself back on the map, even before the O2 Academy opened in 2010. "Nik Sharpe, the promoter at [central Leicester venue] The Cookie, started bringing national acts to the city in a way that they weren't for many years. Now there's a structure as to how bands move through the city where there wasn't for a long time. They'll start at The Cookie, then get to Dryden Street, then up to the Academy." John also promotes the independent, multi-venue festival Handmade, held annually in Leicester. Previous headliners include Rolo Tomassi.

Aside from the MVT's tireless and passionate lobbying and the results they've had so far, the biggest regional success stories are in cities that, like Leicester, have a strong sense of community. Loz Taylor of While She Sleeps is still actively involved in his local scene in Sheffield, and thinks every musician should remember where they came from.

"I put club shows on in Doncaster – that's where I grew up," he says. "I put on an all-day festival in Sheffield once a year called FestiVILE. We had Creeper a few years ago before anyone knew who they were; we've had Trash Talk and Frank Carter, and we also run Battle Of The Bands to give local bands an opportunity to play."

Loz also stresses the importance of giving live music a chance, rather than only using the internet for discovery. "How does anybody know that they don't want to see a band if all they've seen is a few videos on YouTube?" he asks. "That can damage a local scene. It doesn't give people enough of an opportunity to be seen live before they've been vetted online."

He says his industry connections make it easier for him to bring bands up North, but encourages anyone who wants to be part of their local cultural scene to have a go.

"I've always had a big sense of community in the music industry, and even before anything happened with While She Sleeps, I was always the guy trying to put shows on and making sure people knew about it," he says. "I think it's important that people just get up and do it – it might seem like there's no bands coming to your city, but you can always try. Don't wait around for other people to do it if you want to!"

The work the MVT has already done on protecting the UK's grassroots venues is commendable, but Agent Of Change being made law is just the start. It's a battle won, but the war is far from over.

FOR MORE ON THE MVT, GO TO MUSICVENUETRUST.COM. THE NEXT FESTIVILE IS ON OCTOBER 28

"INSTEAD OF WAITING AROUND, BRING BANDS TO YOUR CITY"

WHILE SHE SLEEPS' LOZ TAYLOR URGES PEOPLE TO ORGANISE THEIR OWN GIGS

VENUES NEED YOU!

Here's how you can help your local haunts survive

BRING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER
If there's a venue you're worried about in your area, strength in numbers helps. Get your fellow fans and venue staff together and find out who your local MP is – they could work with you or point you in the direction of people who can help.

BECOME A PROMOTER
The MVT announced its Grassroots Promoter scheme on March 8, International Women's Day. £100,000 of funding is available for women under 25 who want to become promoters – you can learn on the job and help address music's gender imbalance. What's not to like?

While She Sleeps' Loz Taylor runs club shows in his hometown

FEAR FACTORY: DUNCAN EVERSON/CORROSION OF CONFORMITY: ADAM GASSON/LOZ: RYAN CHANG/PRESS

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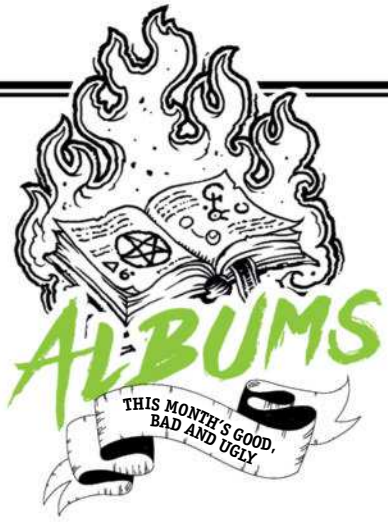


PARKWAY DRIVE

Reverence

EPITAPH

Byron Bay's metal brutalists keep pushing the limits

ONE OF THE things that often gets overlooked when you consider the biggest bands of our world is how the risks and stylistic sharp turns they took ended up paying such huge dividends. Whether it was Iron Maiden bringing in Bruce Dickinson to give them the bombast and grandeur their early material lacked, or Metallica embracing hard rock on the *Black Album*, a willingness to challenge yourself is a hallmark of so much of what makes metal the most exciting and eclectic tribe in music.

It's important to consider this when tracing the path that Parkway Drive have chosen to travel. 2015's *Ire* came as a shock to many, especially when they first heard the galloping singalong of opening single *Vice Grip* – which, ironically, is now considered a genuine anthem. Still, most people accepted it was a dice that needed to be rolled as the walls closed in on what could be done within the confines of metalcore, a decade after the genre came to commercial prominence.

Now *Ire*'s follow-up, *Reverence*, has arrived, it feels like Parkway Drive have already done much of the heavy lifting – the band could essentially have delivered the same again and still remained ahead of the curve. It's to their credit, then, even though *Reverence* won't raise as many eyebrows as *Ire* did, that Parkway are still keen to stretch the boundaries of their music. So, while opener *Wishing Wells* takes old-school melodic leads and melds them with Winston McCall's newfound darker, cleaner and more grizzled vocal range in a song that would have fit perfectly on *Ire*, there are enough moments here where the band are evidently still keen to experiment. There are the folky strings on the slow and sombre *Cemetary Bloom* and the arcane doom chants that underpin *I Hope You Rot* that come with a whole set of black metal vibes, but most impressively of all there is album closer *The Colour Of Leaving*. When justifying Parkway's change in sound previously, Winston was at pains to point to his love of dark troubadours Tom Waits and Nick Cave, and here it is manifested in what is clearly a deeply personal, pitch-black lament that is a wholly different strand of heavy to breakdowns and mosh calls. Whether this is what you want from Parkway Drive or not is an entirely different conversation, but you have to applaud any band willing to accelerate away from their comfort zone at such a compass-spinning tangent.

That being said, if you are worried about a lack of metal in *Reverence* then songs like *Absolute Power* and *Prey* will allay those fears. The latter is full of the thick, juddering, Rage Against The Machine-style grooves that made *Crushed* on *Ire* so popular, and the former swaps the Iron Maiden gallop and leads of the last outing and replaces them with the stomp and swagger of *Black Album* Metallica. In fact, the tone and pace of much of this album is eerily reminiscent of the album that turned Metallica into the biggest metal band of them all. We're not suggesting that *Reverence* will pop in quite such a way, but, with an album that will doubtless continue their relentless march towards metal's upper echelons, expect Parkway Drive to reap the deserving rewards of their sonic gambling.

8

FOR FANS OF: Stray From The Path, Architects, Lamb Of God

STEPHEN HILL

Parkway Drive are exploring new realms of darkness on album six

Winston McCall

VOCALS

WHAT SORT OF ALBUM DID YOU SET OUT TO MAKE WITH *REVERENCE*?

"We'd gone through a hell of a lot of trauma as people, and we didn't have the time or the desire to do something that was safe and anything other than completely honest."

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT TO *IRE*?

"*Ire* was a process where we were transitioning, in the sense that we were finding a new identity and what we were capable of. But we were also holding onto a safety net: 'Fuck, I want to see over the edge, but I want to make sure I don't fall off!' But this time we've been through so much shit. I've seen things that are as bad as they can get, and the worst thing is not someone disliking my music. So we let go of that safety net."

WAS IT SCARY TO LET GO OF THE SAFETY NET?

"It wasn't. It was fucking awesome. And this was one of the easiest records to write, and not in the sense that it's simple music to play. It's in the mindset. Being able to have the focus and make whatever we want to make, because we know it will work as long as we have the conviction to do justice to it."

WAS IT EASY TO GET EVERYBODY ON THE SAME PAGE?

"It was easier than last time, because then we all had patterns of writing which we had to get out of. You would take two steps forward into this brave new area and go, 'Wow, this is great!' And then you'd go home and listen to it and think, 'Oh shit, is this too far?' And then you'd go back and write something that was a rehash of what you'd done before."

REVERSE ENGINEERING *FOUR CLASSIC PARKWAY CUTS*

Killing With A Smile

EPITAPH – 2005

Parkway's debut set skyscraper standards for the fresh-faced Aussies by taking metalcore's second-wave sound and taking it to a new level of savage. Bursting at the seams with beatdowns and mosh calls... and this was only the beginning.

Horizons

EPITAPH – 2007

Considered by many dyed-in-the-wool metalcore fans as the band's magnum opus, *Horizons* succeeded due to Adam D's pristine, scalpel-sharp production job and the band writing some bona fide face-melting anthems like *Carrion* and *Boneyards*.

Deep Blue

EPITAPH – 2010

Arguably the strongest complete set of songs that Parkway Drive have ever put together, *Deep Blue* once again delivers a set of utterly destructive modern metal anthems whilst thematically tying them together in an oceanic concept.

Ire

EPITAPH – 2015

It's been three years since *Ire*'s release and every metalcore band around is still choking on its dust. Taking trad metal, crushing grooves, clean vocals and a newfound stalking darkness, *Ire* proved that they were in a league of their own.

You know what you're getting with 5FDP... well, most of the time

FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH

And Justice For None

ELEVEN SEVEN

Las Vegas bruisers reinvent the wheel... a little

NOW ON THEIR seventh album in barely over a decade, whatever you think of Five Finger Death Punch, lazy they most definitely ain't. Las Vegas's finest have shamelessly stuck to a formula comprising of chugging, meat'n'potatoes metal sprinkled with the occasional kickass power ballad or surprisingly on-point cover, and why not? It's a method that has seen them determinedly march up metal's ranks into a position where they can lay claim to being one of our scene's biggest bands, and a genuine shout for that hallowed 'future festival headliner' tag. And so, to the surprise of no one, *And Justice For None* (coming three years after *Got Your Six*, practically making it *Chinese Democracy* by their standards) is filled with all of the above ingredients... and a little more on the side for good measure. In fact, while their latest album does little to dispute the notion that 5FDP are yet to make a truly classic album, when it slams, it slams hard, and it certainly takes enough interesting sidesteps to diffuse any idea that the guys are resting on their musical laurels or afraid to stretch themselves a little.

That said, both rollocking album opener *Fake* and decent follow-up *Top Of The World* are as Five Fingered as it gets – big, dumb, thumping riffs crashing around Ivan Moody's red-blooded bellows as he switches between his hallmark themes of self-pitying soul-searching and furious, triumphant defiance. Is it derivative?

Of course. Is it still fun as shit? Abso-fucking-lutely, and as always with 5FDP, it works.

Sham Pain (see what they did there, etc) is the first of a few tracks to switch the formula up a little, slowing the pace down into a ballsy, glam-rock-on-'roids stomp, as Ivan sarcastically waxes lyrical on life on the road and the pressures of having to grin and bear it when you'd rather be doing anything but. *Blue On Black*, meanwhile, might be the band's most shameless attempt at a mainstream rock radio hit yet – a country-fried rock'n'roll anthem that could have been written by Chad Kroeger (wait, come back!) if he'd been downing JD and listening to a shit-ton of Black Stone Cherry. That'll doubtless read like aural kryptonite to a lot of fans who like their metal fast and heavy at all times, but against all odds, it also works, and Ivan's vocals – perhaps the most underrated in metal today – fit the style flawlessly.

Fire In The Hole is a more foot-to-the-floor number, but its galloping drums and earnest *'Whoa-oh!'*s make it the closest thing to a power metal song the band have ever produced (yes, really). And guess what? Yep, they pull that one off, too.

5FDP know their way around a great power ballad, and there are a clutch of them here. *I Refuse* is the schmaltziest of the lot and may be a little too syrupy-sweet for some, but *When The Seasons Change* and, in particular, *Stuck In My Ways* hit the spot. *It Doesn't Matter* and *Rock Bottom* are on hand to top up the chug quota, if with less aplomb that the album's openers, while the band's well-received take on The Offspring's *Gone Away* ticks that aforementioned covers box. By the time it gets to mid-paced numbers *Bloody* and *Will The Sun Ever Rise*, it's hard not to feel that this album could have done with losing a couple of tracks, but ultimately, this is a 5FDP record that'll appease longterm fans and, quite possibly, win over a fair few newcomers in the process. Job done.

7

FOR FANS OF: Disturbed, Pantera, All That Remains

MERLIN ALDERSLADE

AMORPHIS
Queen Of Time

NUCLEAR BLAST

Pioneering Finns keep delivering the stirring goods

While it's hard to ignore that Amorphis should be vastly more revered and successful than they are, there is undeniable charm to the Finns' ability to keep quietly churning out great records. *Queen Of Time* is the band's 13th and it continues the subtle evolution that began on 2015's *Under The Red Cloud*, wherein those trademark folk-fuelled melodies, propulsive melodeath riffs and sparkling prog detours collide with a renewed sense of purpose and focus. Ultimately, and this has always been the case, Amorphis are incredible songwriters; everything from stirring opener *The Bee* through to lavish, dramatic closer *Pyres On The Coast* boasts at least one life-affirming hook, and vocalist Tomi Joutsen has never sounded more commanding. Capped off with a dazzling cameo from Anneke van Giersbergen on the gorgeous *Amongst Stars*, *Queen Of Time* is the sound of true unsung heroes proving, again, that they fucking rule. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Eluveitie, Orphaned Land, Vintersorg

DOM LAWSON

ANGELUS APATRIDA
Cabaret De La Guillotine

CENTURY MEDIA

Spanish thrashers take on the US troops at their own game

The Riff: it's the reason that you're reading *Hammer* and the cornerstone of heavy metal music. Like the rest of us, Spanish thrash metal foursome Angelus Apatrida *love* riffs. This, their sixth album, suggests they devour them for breakfast, lunch and tea, and also as a bedtime snack. The band are fiercely patriotic, walking the fine line of their homeland's censorship laws to challenge what they consider its "dictatorship, injustice, fascism, corruption". That such anger flows through the razor-sharp *Downfall Of The Nation*, *Betrayed* and *Ministry Of God* is inevitable. These are fine, furious and well-constructed songs that make it hard to credit Angelus Apatrida hail from Albacete and not America's Bay Arena – the melting point of where it all began. An intelligent mix of tempos and a crystal-clear production strike home, but what really impresses is the impact of those riffs. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Exodus, Death Angel, Sepultura

DAVE LING

ANTHRAX
Kings Among Scotland

NUCLEAR BLAST

New York's thrash veterans head north of the wall

Whatever your opinion of Anthrax's rather sparse and uneven 21st-century output, there's been very little to grumble about when it comes to their consistency in the live environment. This two-hour set recorded live at Glasgow's Barrowland during their 2017 UK headline tour is a case in point. A rabid crowd, who are often louder than the band, give a real air of excitement to the atmosphere, and even songs like newbie *Evil Twin*, which is pedestrian on record, is given a nitro shot. Anthrax can still keep the pace of yesteryear – even if Joey Belladonna's voice has seen better days – and unsurprisingly it's the run of classics like *Caught In A Mosh*, *I Am The Law* and *Indians* that prompt the loudest singalongs. Even entering their fourth decade of visiting these shores, this is a party that you'll wish you'd been part of. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Testament, Municipal Waste, Exodus

STEPHEN HILL

BLACK ROYAL
Lightbringer

SUICIDE

Finnish four-piece take a trip beyond the death'n'roll borders

Has anyone ever wondered what would happen if you crossed Entombed-style death metal with a healthy dollop of pure Sabbath worship and some spacious progressive elements that would fit on a Pink Floyd album? Probably not, and now they never need to, because Finnish quartet Black Royal have created an album that sways in and out of those incredible disparate styles with impressive ease. So, while the opening double salvo of *Cryo-Volcanic* and *Self-Worship* gives you raging death'n'roll before seamlessly leading into a bluesy, sludged-up doom lament, by the end of the album you're being baffled by the wailing melodies and astral projection of album highlight *New World Order*. *Lightbringer* is a record of vast depth, a hell of a lot of ambition and it kicks like a mule. Well worth your time. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Carcass, High On Fire

STEPHEN HILL

ATG: still ahead of the game they helped create

AT THE GATES
To Drink From The Night Itself

CENTURY MEDIA

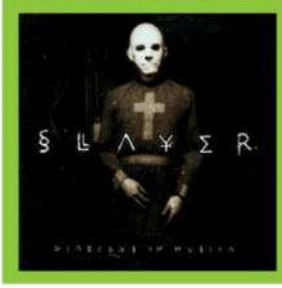
Gothenburg's prodigal pioneers stay on a full charge

DESPITE THE WEIGHT of expectation that comes with a 19-year studio absence after one of the greatest albums of the 90s, *Slaughter Of The Soul*, 2014's *At War With Reality* was as good a comeback as you could have hoped for from the Gothenburg legends. Yet *To Drink From...* brings its own anticipation, given the departure of Anders Björler, whose original exit in 1996 caused the band's premature dissolution, and the introduction of guitarist Jonas Stålhammar, enlisted from vocalist Tomas Lindberg and drummer Adrian Erlandsson's The Lurking Fear project. Though the opening title track's riff has a whiff of *Blinded By Fear*, At The Gates 2.0 keep the much-lauded familiarity and imbues it with a fervent spirit. Just as was the case with the last Anders-less *The Haunted* album, his brother, Jonas, has stepped up and delivered a state-of-the-art masterclass from a band still ahead of the game they helped create. A gritty mix gives the melodic twin riffs even more of a ferocious bite on the piercing cacophony of *A Stare Bound In Stone*, like Cerberus rabidly snarling while being held at bay by the galloping rhythm section. *In Death They Shall Burn* is as perfect as extreme metal songwriting gets, and while this is a nod to their raw, pre-*Slaughter...* infancy, the band also delve further back in time, with metallic antiquity referenced by *Dagger Of Black Haze* and the galloping lead of *In Nameless Sleep* revelling in their Maiden-isms. *Slaughter Of The Soul* will always be an untouchable milestone but album number six is still a classy achievement. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Dark Tranquillity, Carcass, The Black Dahlia Murder

ADAM REES

THIS MONTH IN METAL *ALBUM MONOLITHS FROM THE VAULT*



SLAYER *DIABOLUS IN MUSICA*

COLUMBIA *1998*

It's unusual to consider *Hammer* theorising that Slayer's eighth album would be the one that would "make or break the band". The reason? According to our man Ian Winwood two decades ago, a "horrible, shadowy perception" lurked over the band's shoulders: namely that a new generation of rivals – Korn, Machine Head and Coal Chamber – had marked Slayer's card. Yeah... Coal Chamber... exactly. This fairly ludicrous observation didn't prevent Ian from awarding *Diabolus In Musica* – which he claimed sounded "both like and unlike Slayer" – nine out of 10. "It is Slayer, but it's new Slayer. And it is brilliant," he added. Rumours of Slayer's demise were, of course, grossly exaggerated. How gutting that they are finally about to come true.

Nergal: raising the bar for live albums

BEHEMOTH

Messe Noire

NUCLEAR BLAST

Nergal's unstoppable force go full Satanist

LIVE ALBUMS HAVE become such a redundant format in recent times; they tend to be either cynical stopgap releases or lazily pumped-out contractual obligations, and generally serve little artistic purpose, destined to gather dust on the shelves of only the most devoted fans. But then, of course, there is Behemoth. When the Polish veterans released *The Satanist* in 2015, Nergal's conquering of leukaemia the peerless backstory, the metal world lost its shit en masse, and rightly so. Now routinely regarded as one of the finest extreme metal albums of the last 20 years, it confirmed beyond doubt that Behemoth had matured into a world-beating metal band while, somewhat perversely, becoming ever more extreme and challenging. Subsequently, performing the album in its entirety made perfect sense and *Messe Noire* is a simple but viciously effective document of what happens when a band at the height of their powers perform an adored record to a near-hysterical audience in their nation's capital, Warsaw. Unlike a lot of contemporary live albums, this plunges you into the heart of the action and comes closer to eliminating that tiresome "you probably had to be there" vibe than any live record in recent memory. When the opening riff from *Blow Your Trumpets Gabriel* kicks in, you may find yourself rising to your feet and cheering along with the recorded audience. It really is that exciting.

The live *Satanist* aside, the *Messe Noire* DVD/Blu-ray also boast the rest of the band's live set from Warsaw, including the rarely played *Pure Evil And Hate*, plus another complete live show from Brutal Assault in 2016 and several eye-popping, demon-summoning promo videos. Chuck in some stunning artwork and an unavoidable sense that Nergal and his band may just be getting warmed up, and this is about as (a)live as it gets.

8

FOR FANS OF: Watain, Satyricon, Immolation

DOM LAWSON

BLOOD TSUNAMI

Grave Condition

SOULSELLER

Oslo-based thrash punks come back in from the cold

After spending some time in the wilderness, with bandmembers conscripted to the likes of Emperor, Hellride, Rivera, The Ass, Djevel and Studfaust, the fast and furious foursome known as Blood Tsunami have returned with their first album in five years. Initially intended as a seven-inch EP, their fourth full-length features four new tracks and five older, unreleased ones and is a raucous, warts-and-all slab of punk-peppered thrash that's as subtle as a hammer to the face. *Poison Tongue* is as venomous as the title suggests, *The Collapse*, which uses frontman Pete Evil's grunts as percussion, is absolutely badass and *Gargoyle* is a riotous re-imagining/rip-off of Slayer's *Captor Of Sin*. Fans of Blood Tsunami's even more mayhem-driven offshoot Mongo Ninja will also be happy to learn the defunct act "lives on" in the likes of the exhilaratingly unhinged *The Acid King*.

7

FOR FANS OF: Exodus, Mongo Ninja, D.R.I.

EDWIN McFEE

CRONE

Godspeed

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Secrets Of The Moon frontman finds truth is darker than fiction

Crone's approach to dark, melodic music is touched by real stories that colour their debut full-length with distinct humanity. From Germany's largest mass suicide (*Demmin*), to the incredibly upsetting death of a child refugee washed up on a beach, whose image was spread across the world (*The Perfect Army*), *Godspeed* is full of gorgeous if devastating songs that do justice to the intense subject matter. Led by Secrets Of The Moon's sG – whose rough, David Bowie-esque singing style narrates here – Crone's gothic rock is as gloomy as it beautiful. *The Ptilonist* and its echoing guitars sets the pace with delirious melodies within its chorus while *Mother Crone* speaks of a five-year-old's suicide, jumping from the Golden Gate bridge. The final title track veers a tad too closely to Secrets Of The Moon's latest opus, *Sun*, which does detract a little from the world built up, but it's a small slight on an otherwise exemplary record.

8

FOR FANS OF: Secrets Of The Moon, Crippled Black Phoenix, Katatonia

CHERYL CARTER

THE DALI THUNDERING CONCEPT

Savages

APATHIA

Avant-garde Parisians paint a bleak yet bonkers future

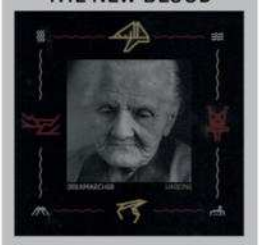
Given the famed surrealist artist they credit in their name, it's unsurprising that these Gallic metallers dispute any notion that djent and tech metal have become formulaic. The four-piece opt for the kitchen sink approach while still maintaining all the clever and meaty hallmarks the movements have become known for. While there are *Blade Runner*-esque synths and distorted soundbites aplenty throughout *Savages*, the music itself does a fine job of painting a troubled vision, with *Blessed With Boredom*'s harsh harmonics and melancholic textures laying a foundation for Sylvian Conier's impassioned roars and yelps. *There Is No Calm Before The Storm* chugs along with an unsettling atmosphere while all manner of riffs and rhythms are thrown into the schizophrenic juggernaut of *Flying With The Shepherd*. There are shades of light in *Empty The Void* and *Utopia* but with grating saxophone on the latter there's no sign of the madcap ideas drying up.

7

FOR FANS OF: Architects, Textures, Meshuggah

ADAM REES

SMALL MERCIES
THE NEW BLOOD



DREAMARCHER

Harding

INDIE RECORDINGS

Dreamarcher have so many ideas that this three-song EP can't do them justice. Hardcore, extreme metal and ambient, progressive ideas are all forced to fight for space, so while it's promising, it's also disorientating. A full-length release would serve them better. **[6]**

STEPHEN HILL

THE HYENA KILL

Spun

APF

With six tracks that cover a lot of ground, this Manchester duo take the swagger of Queens Of The Stone Age and the esoteric emotion of Deftones and smash it all into one cheerfully noisy pot. **[6]**

ADAM REES

IZEGRIM

Beheaded By Trust

LISTENABLE

Whether they're scything away on *Retraumatized* or ominously conquering on *Warmonger*, these Dutch thrash-infused death metallers' USP is the vocals that could cleave meat from bone one minute and then take you to uncharted realms the next. **[6]**

ADAM REES

DESERT STORM
Sentinels

APF

South west UK sludge mob throw their weight around

Dogged diehards of great repute, Desert Storm have threatened to make a record like this for years. A grand leap forward from previous efforts, barbaric epics like monolithic opener *Journey's End* and the genuinely startling *Kingdom Of Horns* are full of tiny acts of subversion, as the lines between sludge, psych and post-metal are lost in an oily swirl of bongwater and inhalable distortion. The hooks are big, the riffs even bigger, and Matt Ryan's vocals provide a gnarly, incensed focal point, particularly on lumbering, bottom-end blitz *Convulsion*. Meanwhile, *Capsized*'s glacial melodrama and melodic thrust points to a future full of proggy possibilities, echoing pre-radio rock Mastodon's narrative knack along the way. *Sentinels* exhibits a canny grasp of how to tick all the important boxes while still lobbing the occasional stick into stoner rock's gently spinning wheel.

7

FOR FANS OF: Boss Keloid, Mastodon, High On Fire

DOM LAWSON

FOLLOW THE CIPHER
Follow The Cipher

NUCLEAR BLAST

Sabaton-aligned power metallers with some magic of their own

Fans of Sabaton may already be familiar with Follow The Cipher. Band founder and guitarist Ken Kängström is a long-time collaborator with Joakim Brodén, and has a songwriting credit on Sabaton classic *Carolus Rex*. FTC have certainly taken inspiration from Sabaton's chugging power metal, but their sense of fun and unabashed penchant for grandiosity will also enchant fans of Nightwish, Amaranthe and Battle Beast. *Follow The Cipher* is jammed with loopy keyboards and overblown solos, delivered with bright-eyed theatrics. Through the mighty-lunged Linda Toni Grahn, the giddy, catchy choruses of *Winterfall* and *The Rising* beg to inspire crowd sing-alongs. But anthemic songs aren't the only tricks these Swedes have to call upon – *Starlight* tones down the sparkle with flashes of heaviness and guttural vocals amongst the bombast. This is a band the power community should be excited about.

7

FOR FANS OF: Battle Beast, Sabaton, Nightwish

DANNII LEIVERS

GOZU
Equilibrium

METAL BLADE/BLACKLIGHT MEDIA

Psychedelic stoner rockers celebrate 10 trips around the sun

With their third album, 2016's *Revival*, Boston stoner-rockers Gozu dialled up the aggression, making their sound even more compulsive, and then celebrated their 10-year tenure with a new opus. A boisterous blend of psychedelia, stoner-fuzz and grit-laden grunge, *Equilibrium* treads a similar sonic path to *Revival*, but with a renewed focus on song-writing. Sprawling opener *Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat* comes replete with early Black Sabbath dissonance as Ian Astbury-esque growls slam against downtuned grooves. Laden with penetrating melodies, the refrains of *They Probably Know Karate* and *Prison Elbows* will lodge themselves deep within your cranium. The former is an out-and-out juggernaut elevated by Doug Sherman's brazenly crushing riffs while the latter's layered outro passages showcase the band's near-transcendental psychedelic tendencies. A decade in, Gozu still know how to deliver an enjoyable trip.

6

FOR FANS OF: Fu Manchu, Mastodon, Orange Goblin, Clutch

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

HAGGARD CAT
Challenger

EARACHE

Former Heck members forge a new direction with fuzz

Stepping into the increasingly busy space of heavy-hitting fuzz rock duos, Haggard Cat features ex-Heck members Matt Reynolds (guitar/vocals) and Tom Marsh (drums) in their bid to cross over from the chaotic hardcore of their old band into fields of rock, pop and post-punk. With a reedy, simmering guitar line and the unyielding metronomic stomp of the kick drum, *The Patriot* opens *Challenger* with a sleazy rock'n'roll swagger reminiscent of QOTSA. Thankfully, there's far more to the record than rote Josh Homme worship and *Bone Shaker* and *The Felon* ooze with greasy slide guitar, filthy riffs and stupidly addictive grooves that make standing still a physical impossibility. Elsewhere, *Bearfoot* kicks into a dizzying, full-throttle freakout of scorching fretwork, throaty screams and Bonham-style beats. Perfect for boozy, post-pub parties when things are just starting to get interesting.

7

FOR FANS OF: Royal Blood, Wolfmother, The Black Angels

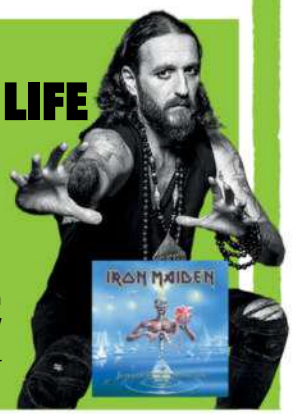
JOE DALY

ALBUM THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

KOBI FARHI
Orphaned Land

IRON MAIDEN
Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son

"*Seventh Son*... was the album that got me into metal, a life-changing experience. It's the album I'll take with me to anywhere if I have to choose only one. It's magic and it's the album of the religion of metal I've practised ever since. The rest is history."



Boss Keloid: guaranteed to invoke beard-stroking wonderment

BOSS KELOID
Melted On The Inch

HOLY ROAR

Wigan's eclectic subgenre alchemists return

BOSS KELOID'S SOPHOMORE album, 2016's *Herb Your Enthusiasm*, catapulted the Wigan quintet onto the world's radar with a transfixing synthesis of prog, psych, stoner and doom, showcasing a broadened compositional outlook that extended well beyond the middle of the prog metal pack. Sidestepping any urge to rehash the formula, *Melted On The Inch* is their most ambitious effort yet. This is a resinous journey into the gauzy realm of mesmerising grooves, prismatic melodies and towering metal riffage, incorporating even more influences, more tonal experimentalism and more inventive song structures than ever before. Opener *Chronosiam* delivers a statement of intent with an onslaught of sharp, slamming riffs and a soaring, anthemic chorus. Alternately bludgeoning and intricate, the track employs thudding percussive repetition and eerie keyboards as a rhythmic build-up to the bone-crushing climax, like a long fuse running into a bundle of dynamite. Had the band revisited this blueprint throughout the remainder of the tracks, we'd be left with just another prog metal album, but *Chronosiam* is a launchpad for something far greater. *Tarku Shavel* showcases a deft command of melodic innovation and a knack for composing lush, memorable choruses that betray an innate fragility never overshadowed by the heaviness within the tracks.

Over the years vocalist/guitarist Alex Hurst has been compared to Clutch's Neil Fallon, with both singers boasting prodigious gifts for storytelling, not to mention a smooth, barrel-aged bellow. Yet with *Melted On The Inch* he delivers a more nuanced and refined performance, particularly on *Lokannok* – an enthralling exercise in uber-heavy psychedelia. With guitarist Paul Swarbrick, drummer Ste Arands, keyboardist Matthew Milne and bassist Charlie Seisay, Boss Keloid have composed a work of jaw-dropping technicality and provocative emotional depth. One listen isn't enough to connect with these six tracks; this record needs to be thrown on repeat and absorbed at a cellular level. Plan on hearing a lot about this record in 2018.

8

FOR FANS OF: Baroness, Mastodon, Opeth

JOE DALY

Cancer Bats have some lairy tales

CANCER BATS
The Spark That Moves
BAT SKULL

Toronto punk champions deliver more attitude than hooks

IT'S BEEN THREE years since Cancer Bats last reared their lairy, sweaty heads. Last time, *Searching For Zero* angered some in the punk community looking for better production but delighted those who prefer their music a little more rough around the edges. Cancer Bats clearly haven't listened to the critics, as *The Spark That Moves* is still a rugged, murky affair, but it acts as a reminder of why we fell in love with the Canadians in the first place.

Cancer Bats are still out for fun, and their sixth full-length still brings an infectious joy and enthusiasm to the Southern rock-tinged party. Each song sounds like a runaway train, rollicking along covered in its own spittle. That said, it's missing the ball-busting anthemics we know and love – how many times have you thrown down to *Hail Destroyer* or *Bricks And Mortar*? Sure, *We Run Free* brings the chaos and revved-up fury only they can deliver, but there's a distinct lack of hooks throughout, and the back end of the album struggles to retain the same semblance of adrenaline and anticipation as the opening bounce and determination of *Gatekeeper*.

Liam Cormier's signature drawl and Scott Middleton's rampant riffery provide a titanium spine to the frenetic fervour. Not every song is a classic, but there's not even a hint of a band selling out or settling down. This is the sound of a band comfortable in their own inky skin, bringing barrels of charismatic chaos to the world's punk contingent. While Liam bellows about humanity's lack of respect for the planet on *Space And Time*, there's a vein of defiance and independence pumping through each track. Hearing a bunch of smiling, fist-pumping diehards return to the OG sensibilities of sticking your middle finger into the face of anyone who tells you how to live or love (see *Headwound*) remains a cause for celebration. No, it's not going to set the world of rock'n'roll aflame, but as long as the Cancer Bats fire keeps burning, the world is a better place. **7**

FOR FANS OF: The Bronx, Every Time I Die, Comeback Kid

LUKE MORTON

HARABALL
Hypno
FYSISK FORMAT

Seasoned Nordic hardcore punks crawl out of their comfort zone

Boasting members of Tiebreak, Fairfuck and more, this Norwegian five-piece have some solid experience behind them. Since forming in 2011, Haraball's sound has moved on from their raw, straight-edge roots but this third album delivers a surprising new shift in style. The band have dialled up the grimy old-school punk, turned the catchy hardcore all the way down, and added some experimental layers to the mix. The album opens with an eerie, atmospheric sample before *Hog Peni* and snarling first single *Coyotes* drop in with a fast, dirty party vibe. Later, *Bacterion* and *Authority Magnet* deliver some satisfyingly nasty aggression and *White Chickens* offers more quirky, melodic relief. Other tracks, however, are simply too murky or unmemorable. Gone is the gruff, edgy anger and in its place is a noisier experimental darkness with sprinklings of synth that proves unnervingly hit or miss. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Bad Brains, Poison Idea, Haust

NIK YOUNG

HOLLYWOOD BURNS
Invaders
BLOOD MUSIC

Synthwave newcomer hits a cinematic motherlode

The rise of synthwave in recent years has been stratospheric; this seemingly nerdy subgenre of electronic music has broken out and become embraced by the metal underground and beyond. Hollywood Burns, aka French composer Emeric Lavardon, takes all that's good about the genre – huge washes of synth, massively catchy hooks, nostalgia for days gone by and retro videogames – and weaves curious textures with a Theremin, giving this debut a wildly evocative, 50s B-movie feel. Hollywood Burns may be a new name on the scene but *Invaders* is incredibly assured; there's a distinct narrative and aesthetic that passes from the cover art through to the songs and in *Black Saucers* the Emeric pushes the retro aspect from the opening seconds with eerie thrusts of Theremin laced around the more modern synth work. It's a dazzling beginning, setting the tone for a record that wears its pixellated heart firmly on its sleeve. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Perturbator, GosT, Master Boot Record

CHERYL CARTER

KOBRA AND THE LOTUS
Prevail II
NAPALM

Symphonic Canadians complete a heroic two-part quest

Canadian power metal warriors Kobra And The Lotus harnessed defiance and pure metallic abandon with *Prevail I*, and with part two the five-piece are saddling up to ride towards symphonic victory. Encompassing the pure joy of heavy metal alongside bona fide classic rock, opener *Losing My Humanity* waxes lyrical on the bleaker side of mankind amongst a plethora of driving riffs and gloriously overblown solos. Crystalline harmonies dovetail seamlessly into operatic wails, creating a wall of sound. *Let Me Love You* and *You're Insane* are heroic anthems, the latter bursting with the kind of war cries that make you want to punch the air whilst the rich, uplifting melodies of elegiac *White Water* are unabashed in showing off the album's soulful inclinations. *Prevail II* acknowledges KATL's roots, but ultimately that willingness to experiment will provide longevity. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Battle Beast, Epica, Beyond The Black

SOPHIE MAUGAN

SMALL MERCIES
THE NEW BLOOD

PRETTY PISTOL
Welcome To The Dead Club
SAYSOMETHING

Pretty Pistol vocalist Laura Le Rox barely draws breath on this EP that fuses serrated garage-punk guitars and catchy choruses. *Cry Wolf* is particularly effective; you can almost feel the spit spraying the walls. Ballsy. **[7]**

DANNII LEIVERS

SYDEN
This Night Will Kill Us All
BIG DAY

Driven by the billowing, urban exuberance that defines the Nordic punk scene today, but awash with nostalgia for its ruffled, melodic roots, these four tracks of revved-up rock'n'roll bring an undercurrent of sensitivity to their gang-chant grit. **[7]**

JONATHAN SELZER

TRC
Lifestyle
SELF-RELEASED

TRC return with six exhilarating tracks that merge Hatebreed-styled riffs with grime. Despite their five-year break, the London crossover crew remain a unique proposition, and *Moaner* and *Same. But Better.* are fired-up with infectious energy. **[7]**

DANNII LEIVERS

LLNN
Deads
PELAGIC

A harrowing journey into the darkest recesses of post-metal

Some records act as stimuli, evocative of things, people and places. *Deads* is the killing floor of an abattoir. It's only LLNN's second full-length, but most of its sprawling, hardcore-flecked post-metal is comparable to Cult Of Luna's *Vertikal* masterwork. This is cold, despiteful, unforgiving music. Instrumental tracks flesh out the horror, the mechanical segues not setting the scene but rather orchestrating it. There's no respite; every dark-ambient passage stacks up the tension before throwing you into crushing, painful heaviness on the bass, grinding riffs and skin-flaying grotesqueries in every wound-raw scream. The hooks are sturdy and the weight of the crescendos is absurd, but LLNN's greatest achievement is realised upon multiple listens, once the scraping nuances and background effects have sunk in. The pant-shitting sense of dread, the genuine discomfort, lingers long after *Deads* climaxes. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Neurosis, John Carpenter

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

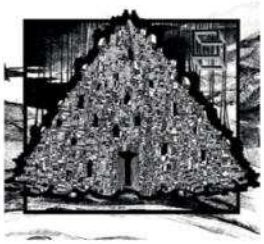
MELVINS
Pinkus Abortion Technician
IPECAC

Washington's celebrated absurdists form a new alliance

A good number of musical history's experiments have the Melvins' name stamped on them and the latest entry into the irreverent legends' extensive discography has them employing two bassists: Jeff Pinkus and Steven McDonald. Despite this, *Pinkus Abortion Technician* – a take on the classic *Locust Abortion Technician* album by Pinkus's other band, Butthole Surfers – won't blow out speakers or bowels; it's surprisingly quirky and light-hearted. The *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* cover is thick, but not oppressive, *Flamboyant Duck* mostly twangs acoustically and tar-paced rocker *Prenup Butter* uses a wah pedal in a way Cliff Burton fans will appreciate. It's really only the scuzzy blues of *Don't Forget To Breathe* and *Break Bread*'s stadium-sized rock where bass-driven thunder is felt and, as with most Melvins releases, highlights and lowlights are based on whether listeners prefer to rock out or let outsider-art waves wash over them. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Butthole Surfers, Big Black, Cows

CONNIE GORDON



POLY-MATH
House Of Wisdom | We Are The Devil
LONELY VOYAGE

Brighton progressive post-rockers offer a wild ride into history

Until now, Poly-Math have administered their sprawling, instrumental prog-math in manageable doses. And for good reason. On six-track debut *Reptiles* and 2016's three-track *Melencolia*, whose tracks clocked in at average of 10 minutes, the trio's intricate music proved not for the faint-hearted. Their first full-length raises the bar on what constitutes challenging. *House Of Wisdom...* is ambitious and commands concentration and patience; drawing from post-rock, math and prog, it grapples with the concept of the 1258 siege of Baghdad and destruction of the Houses Of Wisdom over 11 tracks of organised chaos that veer between jagged rhythms and immersive, 13-minute labyrinths. *Ink Of Scholars | Blood Of Tigres* is hooky and impossibly tight, while simultaneously rejecting anything vaguely resembling recognisable structure. Poly-Math are up there with the best of their genre. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Animals As Leaders, And So I Watch You..., Mars Volta

DANNII LEIVERS

RIOT V
Armor Of Light
NUCLEAR BLAST

New York City's heavy metal originals top up their tank

Debuting in 1977, Riot are among the founding fathers of heavy metal. With 1988's *Thundersteel* they forged new directions that came to define 90s power metal, so we cut them some slack when *Armor Of Light* assaults us with the iron-clad genre cliché checklist: metronomic double-bass drums, Minnie Mouse-high vocals, goof-ball lyrics (*'Angel's thunder, devil's reign, heavy metal runs through my veins!'*). They're all deployed with decades of experience and savvy in the service of some jubilantly catchy tunes, crammed with sizzling twin-guitar. The first seven songs surge out in a dizzying energised rush, an extraordinary sensation to be generated by musicians in their mid-50s. At 56 minutes, it loses momentum on a string of so-so plodders, but reignites on killer closer *Raining Fire*, an irresistible volley of high-gloss tech-thrash nudging the LP to greatness. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, Helloween

CHRIS CHANTLER

LAST ALBUM BOUGHT

HOWARD JONES
Light The Torch

THE DARKNESS
Pinewood Smile

"I bought this alongside Juicy J from Three 6 Mafia's new mixtape. The Darkness: great musicianship and absolutely hysterical lyrics. Juicy J: he just rules. These things I have stated are fact. If you haven't seen The Darkness live, your parents raised you to hate fun."

Dimmu Borgir: back, and as flame-boyant as ever

DIMMU BORGIR
Eonian
NUCLEAR BLAST

The prodigal blackhearts return in renewed splendour

AS THE BAND that first made Norwegian black metal a truly commercial proposition, a certain burden of expectation hangs over everything Dimmu Borgir do. It certainly doesn't help that the band's 21st-century work has been uniformly bombastic and grandiose in a way that few of their peers, Norwegian or otherwise, can match. After a somewhat mixed reaction to 2010's *Abrahadabra* and an unexpectedly lengthy hiatus, Shagrath, Silenoz and their ghoulish brethren have a point to prove on their 10th studio album. Happily, *Eonian* unequivocally delivers.

There are choirs, there are orchestras, there are bursts of industrial noise and, we can only assume, there are several skull-encrusted kitchen sinks knocking around in here, too. Most of all, there are some wickedly complex and yet hugely memorable songs, starting with grand opener *The Unveiling*, which crams an insane number of ideas into its six imperious minutes, and continuing with irresistible first single, *Interdimensional Summit*. It's a succinct synopsis of Dimmu's trademark sound, but souped-up and blessed with some of the band's sharpest hooks to date. *Aetheric* is a more challenging beast, full of warped tempo shifts and sudden moodswings, while *Council Of Wolves And Snakes* begins like Slayer-gone-cosmic, morphs into a blitzkrieg of muscular mid-paced riffs and then side-steps neatly into a serene choral midsection. It's all meticulously crafted and beautifully realised, Dimmu Borgir's dedication to making everything sound absolutely huge serving such extravagant material well. Where *Abrahadabra* occasionally felt over-egged, *Eonian* is a masterclass in fine details and finesse. *The Empyrean Phoenix* is symphonic metal given a hellish, fearless makeover, *I Am Sovereign* offers a maze of brutal and refined ideas that blossoms into a thrilling melodic crescendo and, best of the lot, *Alpha Aeon Omega* conjures the spirit of early 90s blackness, insane 130bpm blastbeats included, while still sounding fully in sync with extreme metal's cutting edge. Yup, they're back and still thinking big. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Cradle Of Filth, Epica

DOM LAWSON

GETTY

One of these men has dropped his invisible oranges...

METALLICA

The $5.98 EP: Garage Days Re-Revisited

BLACKENED

Heavy metal's biggest band pay tribute to their heroes... again

PRESUMABLY REISSUED TO commemorate the, erm, 31st anniversary of its original release, Metallica's legendary 1987 EP remains one of the most stupidly exciting records in the band's intermittently revered catalogue. The first Metallica release to feature then-new bassist Jason Newsted, *Garage Days Re-Revisited* came between the career-defining majesty of *Master Of Puppets* and the bold, prog-tinged splurge of *...And Justice For All*. A snotty five-tracks covers EP, it seemed to confirm at the time that not only was everything back on track after the tragic death of Cliff Burton, but that despite their impending fame, they were still very much in tune with the grubby metal and punk scenes that spawned them. You might reasonably argue that the entire NWOBHM nostalgia industry grew from this one record, as these spiky, loose-limbed assaults on songs by Diamond Head, Holocaust and Budgie were most fans' introduction to those bands' oeuvres. Of the three, Diamond Head's *Helpless* remains the highlight, while Newsted's thunderous intro to Budgie's *Crash Course In Brain Surgery* remains one of the most joyous noises you will ever hear. No wonder the fans took to him so readily.

Meanwhile, Metallica's ferocious take on Killing Joke's *The Wait* (which wasn't included on the EP's original UK release, but is present here) is an eerie joy and, most famously, their gleeful decimation of the Misfits' *Last Caress/Green Hell* proudly muddied the waters between punk and metal and, ultimately, must have bought Glenn Danzig at least one new house. Yes, the whole thing has been remastered and sounds great, but this was never an exercise in sonic perfection; instead, whack it on, crank it right up and enjoy the sound of one of metal's greatest ever bands saluting their heroes and kicking out the jams.

8

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Motörhead, Misfits

DOM LAWSON

RIVERS OF NIHIL

Where Owls Know My Name

METAL BLADE

Pennsylvania's progressive extremists hit an all-new apex

On their third full-length album, Rivers Of Nihil have finally done it: they've crafted the fully-realised magnum opus that fans have been clamouring for ever since the band first exploded onto the extreme metal scene almost a decade ago. While *The Conscious Seed Of Light* and *Monarchy* are solid slices of experimental aggression, neither hold a candle to this latest juggernaut, which effortlessly balances the riffs of Enslaved, the drumming of Gojira, the songwriting skill of Death and the diverse instrumentation of Norway's Shining. It's a Frankenstein's monster of the tech-metal world. *Where Owls Know My Name* brilliantly blends thoroughbred, American brutality with European adventurousness, and the end result is an undeniable triumph. If, in future, they can expand upon this disc's monumental precedent, Rivers Of Nihil could well be the next heirs to the heavy prog throne.

8

FOR FANS OF: Meshuggah, Ne Obliviscaris, Slugdge

MATT MILLS

SHIELDS

Life In Exile

LONG BRANCH

Tech-metalcore upstarts find themselves in the wake of a tragedy

London ensemble Shields lost their guitarist, George Christie, to suicide in January, and this tragic loss makes listening to *Life In Exile*, their debut LP, all the more devastating. Having spent years skirting the toilet circuit being lauded as 'ones to watch' on the scene, the guys unleash wave after wave of rampage and visceral destruction with this release, but with the innate ability to shift between atmospheric soundscapes and uncompromising brutality. On the highly emotive *Black Dog* and lead track *It's Killing Me*, Joe Edward's nihilistic growls wrestle with guitarist Sam Kubrick's stirring cleans, while *Aokigahara* showcases a triumphant encapsulation of the doom-laden defiance and brutal honesty that make up the 43-minute runtime. Bursting with passion and despair, *Life In Exile* delves into the darkest recesses of the psyche, but ultimately transcends the emotional turmoil that these guys have endured.

8

FOR FANS OF: Architects, Parkway Drive, Northlane

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

TOUNDRA

Vortex

INSIDE OUT

Spanish post-rockers take an exhilarating scenic route

The fifth album from Madrid quartet Toundra, *Vortex* is a thrilling slab of viscerally exciting post-rock. Veering through genres with joyous abandon, there are moments of stoner rock groove, Explosions In The Sky-style sonic landscaping, and even Status Quo-esque guitar breaks. Less drunken joyride and more messy night out guided by a sober friend, *Vortex* never loses its sense of identity. Equally comfortable with life-affirming guitar crescendos (*Cobra*) and electronic-inflected atmospherics (*Mojave*), Toundra have honed their sound over the last decade to the extent that they mostly avoid the self-indulgent pitfalls of the genre. It may clock in at 43 minutes for just eight songs, but every note and beat feels earned; rarely does such flagrant delay pedal abuse feel this vital. A bombardment of claustrophobia and ecstasy, often within the same song, *Vortex* is a breathtaking piece of work.

8

FOR FANS OF: Explosions In The Sky, Vola, This Will Destroy You

ROB BARBOUR

WORLD SERVICE
GLOBAL METAL

AGAINST EVIL

All Hail The King

SELF-RELEASED

A band from India inspired by NWOBHM, with a touch of contemporary Euro power metal. It works rather well, with Arch Enemy guitarist Jeff Loomis even guesting on *Sentenced To Death*. *All Hail The King* is a very promising, quality debut. **[7]**

MALCOLM DOME

KILLIBRIUM

Purge

TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Ruthlessly precise but horribly dark with it, this Mumbai crew's muscular but nimble take on old-to-new-school death metal slams with maximum ferocity and occasional hints toward a more daring future. This is a great first effort. **[6]**

DOM LAWSON

NYTT LAND

Odal

COLD SPRING

Now on album number four, these Siberian pagan mystics aren't lacking dedication, atmosphere or spinechilling, Lindy-Fay Hella-esque vocals, but their runic ruminations are too one-paced and, as the title suggests, this is basically an offering to Wardruna. **[6]**

JONATHAN SELZER

UNPROCESSED
Covenant

LONGBRANCH

Lush, complex imaginings from German tech debutants

In such a saturated field, emerging tech metal bands need to be a lot more than expertly proficient and chin-strokingly interesting; a certain extra spice is required. German newcomers Unprocessed clearly belie their name. Their tight playing and punchy, bassy tones sound like they've been created by a sentient intelligence in some far-flung dystopian realm, but maintain a bit of grit under the fingernails. When this synthetic timbre and snappy rhythmic interplay is played with such tenacity it leads to thrilling results, not least on the otherworldly soundscapes and soaring leads that help navigate *Haven*'s labyrinth of spiky passages. Shimmering melodies and nuances lay the platform for dexterous vocals on *Malleable* that will certainly please fans of Tesseract's sonic dexterity. At its worst *Covenant* is tech metal with fizz and nous and at its best it's an impressive musical journey. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Tesseract, The Contortionist, After The Burial

ADAM REES

VALIS ABLAZE
Boundless

LONG BRANCH

Djent newcomers make a stirring first step on their debut full-length

Djent can be seen as a scene for musical obsessives, but Bristol-based five-piece Valis Ablaze have opened the door for the curious to dip a toe into the genre on their debut record. All the djent hallmarks are present and correct: the low-end groove and angular rhythms are there on songs like recent single *Paradox* and *Lumen*. There's a feeling on *Boundless* that the songs are being influenced by the djent movement but are certainly not being defined by it, with the band trying to expand their sonic palette by injecting a classic rock-style guitar solo on *Faster Than Light* and soaring melodic vocals evident throughout with unclean vocals kept to a minimum. This isn't Periphery by any stretch, but it is a solid recording foundation for Valis Ablaze to build upon. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Tesseract, Sikth, Architects

CRAIG HUNTLEY

WOLF KING
Loyal To The Soil

PROSTHETIC

Blackened West Coast hardcore with a savage bite

Bay Area blackened hardcore mob Wolf King waste no time at all in planting their scorched flag. Taking the thrash legacy of their home and dyeing every inch of it pitch-black, there's unparalleled rage in every second of *Loyal To The Soil*. Opener *Hail The Ash* is their 100mph entrance, lurching forward with a pace that's only amped up by the likes of latter-half highlight *Greater Power*, while the title track is split over two chapters – a unifying, gang-vocal-ready thrash epic, and a doom-laden follow-up. Those dynamic leaps of faith land with an almighty stomp on the likes of *Betrayer* and second two-parter *Mortals*, and vocalist Tim Wilson follows suit, coming off like a feral, possessed creature, contorting himself into ghastly new guises as he exorcises the demons of everyday existence. A nihilistic nightmare, in the very best sense. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Last Witness, Conjurer, Converge

TOM CONNICK

WRONG
Feel Great

RELAPSE

Torche and Kylesa members groove to the sound of 90s NY metal

Simplicity can be deceiving. Think of the basic elements constituting Helmet's alt-metal jackhammer. On the surface, it's all quarter notes, drop-D barre chords, assembly-line rhythms and monosyllabic vocal barking. Throw in melodic bits, solos that are as equally free jazz as bell-end-meets-guitar-strings randomness and it seems straightforward enough. But consistency and quality have long been elusive for those aping this sound as very few have managed to recreate that classy pummel. This is where Florida's Wrong come in. Lambast them all you like for essentially Xeroxing Helmet's first three albums, but they do it best and with more grit than Page Hamilton and his recent hired guns. *Feel Great* does showcase a developing melodic voice and noisy edginess but, at its heart, it's one of the best homages to a recognisable sound that children of the 90s could hope for. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Helmet, Helmet, Helmet

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Skindred deliver an album of *Big Tings*... just not Particularly Memorable Tings

SKINDRED
Big Tings

NAPALM

Ragga-rock partiers offer a collection of safe yet fun anthems

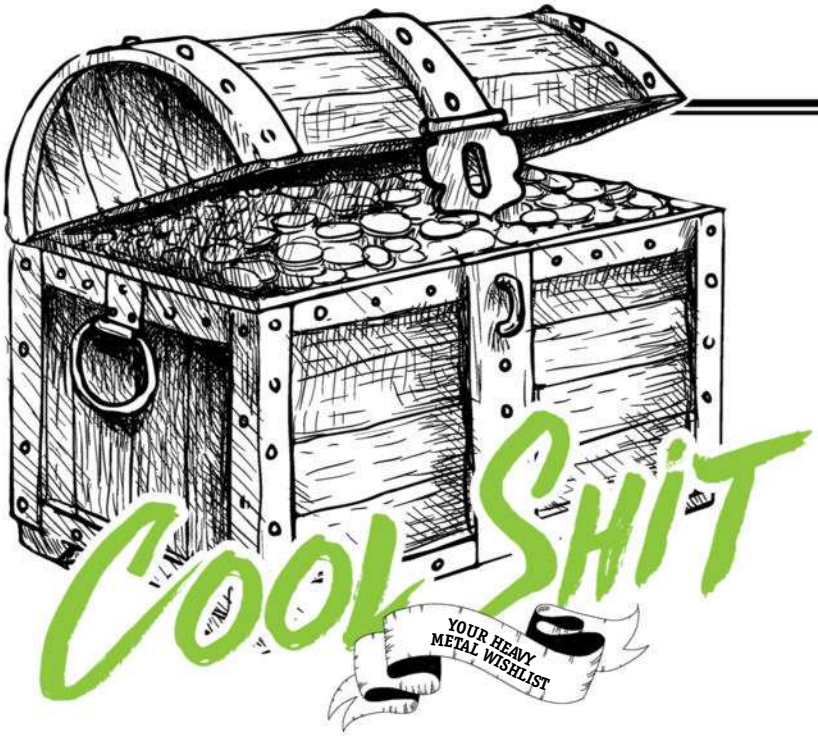
BELOVED BRITS SKINDRED are the ultimate 'night out' metal band. Their massive canon of infectious anthems always ensures that a concert with these adrenaline-pumping melody-makers is one packed to the brim with energy, spontaneity and singalongs. In that regard, it feels rather appropriate that their brand new seventh album, *Big Tings*, is, in and of itself, like a manic night out: wildly good fun as you're experiencing it, but you soon end up forgetting a good amount of it.

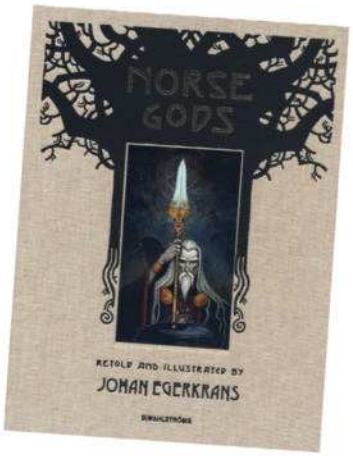
Despite tossing in a few musical curveballs, *Big Tings* is predominantly Skindred playing to their arena-filling strengths. The entire record is driven by its choruses, which all have enough power packed inside of them to stand side-by-side on setlists with favourites like *Kill The Power* and *Warning*. The primary difference is that, while Skindred's most successful tracks all have eclectic hooks inspired by genres from reggae to hip hop to groove metal, *Big Tings* specialises in more straightforward rock'n'roll, as epitomised by its love-letter to AC/DC, lead single *Machine*. Unique touches like electronic beats and Benji Webbe's frantic fusion of rapping and singing feel under-emphasised, only really sneaking through in the disc's latter half.

However, in the heat of the moment, choice cuts from *Big Tings* have the potential to shine in a live setting, which – over the past 15 years – has become Skindred's proving ground. It's easy to imagine giant crowds lapping up the lengthy refrain of *Broken Glass* or the rowdy bombast of *All This Time*. Despite its self-restrictive nature, this latest offering clearly demonstrates one of rock's most likeable groups packing just as much fun and passion into their tunes as ever. You will probably have a spectacular time with *Big Tings*' material upon hearing it live. Just don't expect to be humming it the next morning. **6**

FOR FANS OF: (hed)pe., AC/DC, POD

MATT MILLS





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Arriving after an eight-year wait, Dimmu Borgir's ninth original album was never going to be a back-to-basics approach, and while *Eonian* holds back on some of the bombast of its predecessor *Abrahadabra*, it's still a sweeping, orchestral endeavour, forging new channels for its Luciferian themes to flow along. This accompanying box set is no slouch in the grandeur stakes either, containing the album in both gatefold double vinyl – and clear vinyl at that – and CD digipack form, as well as an exclusive, five-track demo CD revealing the compositional nous at the heart of their pomp. The only other extra is a large and exclusive fold-out poster, but housed in a very handsome box, this is still a thing of splendour that won't break the bank. It might, however, blow a few brain cells instead.

http://tinyurl.com/eonian-box

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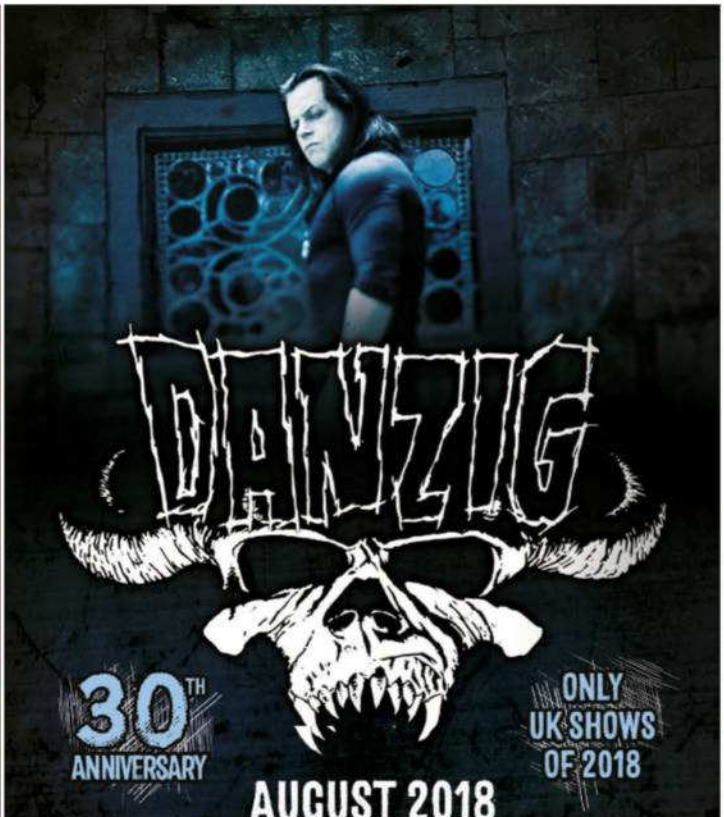

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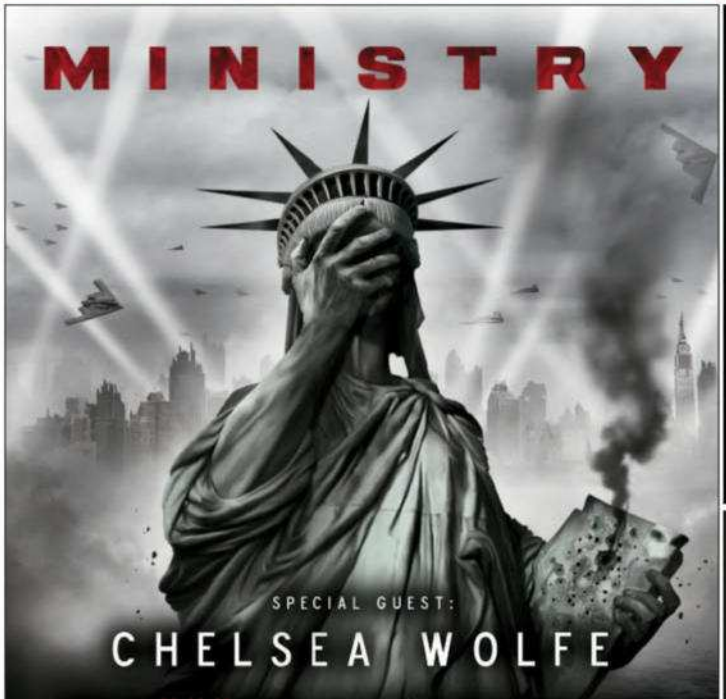

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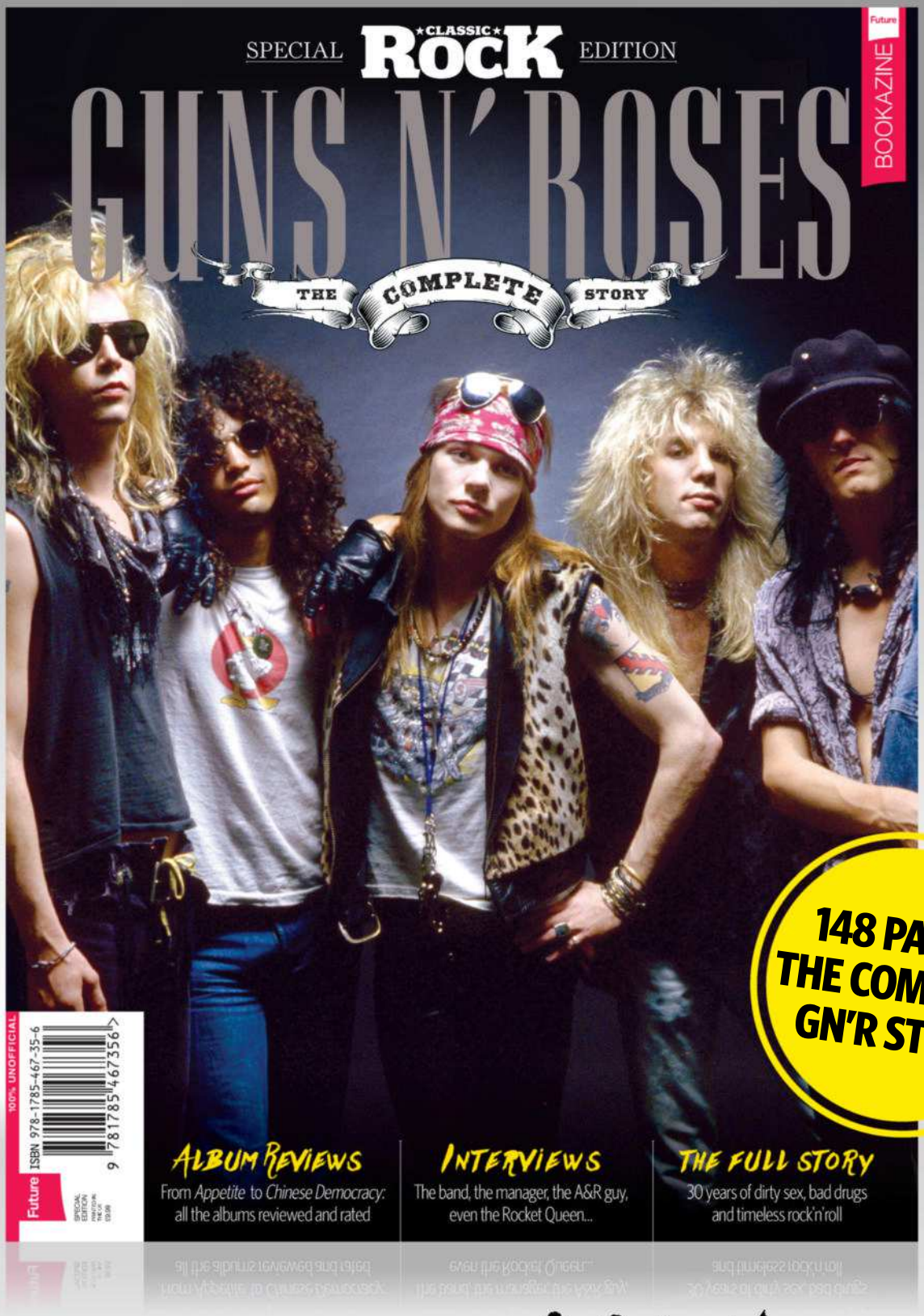

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SETLIST

Overture
Never Go Back
Lacrymosa
The End Of The Dream
My Heart Is Broken
Lithium
Bring Me To Life
Unraveling
Imaginary
Secret Door
Hi-Lo
Lost In Paradise
Your Star
My Immortal
The In-Between
Imperfection

ENCORE
Speak To Me
Good Enough

ENCORE
Swimming Home

KEVIN NIXON

The word 'epic' is frequently overused. Here, it couldn't be more apt

Arkansas' gothic metal heroes embrace their classical side

ALL EYES ARE on Amy Lee. The singer-pianist is illuminated by a single spotlight as her distinctive husky vocals caress each note of the melancholic *Lithium* and her fingers dart across the piano keys, causing her diaphanous sleeves to flutter like a raven's wings in slow motion. The concert is almost at the halfway point and yet there's no chattering, no rushing to the bar, and no one is viewing the show through their phone; the atmosphere is charged and the audience are completely transfixed. It's hard to believe this is the same nu gothic goddess who bounced along to *Bring Me To Life* back in 2003.

Performing live with an orchestra is a challenge for any artist; it takes great skill and an intense rehearsal schedule to successfully pull it off. Metallica have done it, so have Within Temptation and Epica. And now it's Evanescence's turn to embrace their classical side. Amy's piano has often been on the band's tech rider, but last year the Arkansas quintet reworked material from their previous albums in an electro-orchestral style on the acclaimed *Synthesis*. Now they're bringing those songs to the stage with a different 'local orchestra' each time. There's an impressive team involved and it's all overseen by Hollywood conductor Susie Seiter, whose previously orchestrated scores for blockbuster movies include *Minions*, Guillermo del Toro's gothic spectacle *Crimson Peak* and *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. But given the peripatetic nature of the orchestras, does this approach really work live?

Tonight's the first of two sold-out shows at the prestigious Royal Festival Hall – a venue more accustomed to classical concerts than rock shows – and it couldn't be more different from last year's 'electric' gig at the Eventim Apollo. In addition to the orchestra, the audience are sitting on plush velvet seats, and there's no moshpit either. Add Amy's incredible stage presence and the whole experience feels very formal but remarkably intimate.

Cries of "We love you, Amy!" echo around the multi-tiered concert hall as Evanescence perform *Synthesis* in full. The revamped *My Star*, originally from 2006's brooding *The Open Door*, sweeps and soars beautifully, and despite the stately atmosphere Amy can't resist bouncing along from her piano stool. *Imaginary* and the chart-topping anthem *Bring Me To Life*, both from the platinum debut *Fallen*, are given a bold new edge, although there are times when the electronic elements drown out the subtleties of the live orchestra. But powerful oldie *My Immortal*, which Amy introduces as one of her "least favourite" songs, is pure perfection. It earns one of the biggest cheers of the night and leaves everyone with something in their eyes. It's thrilling to hear such well-loved songs updated in this way, and if the explosive renditions of new tracks *Hi-Lo* and *Imperfection* indicate the band's new musical direction, their next studio album will be really special.

ON PAPER, IT might seem like Evanescence are trying to imitate the likes of Nightwish or Epica, but their electro-orchestral enhanced sound is more neo-classical fusion than symphonic metal. There are no distracting video screens – onstage projections are kept to the bare minimum – and no pyros or costume changes. It's little secret that Amy has often struggled with her voice in the live environment and preventative measures have been taken tonight; her vocals are given an extra burst of power with some beautiful harmonies from guitarist Jen Majura, who also plays the eerie theremin.

But this isn't just An Evening With Amy Lee; all her bandmates are onstage too and for this tour, drummer Will Hunt is – somewhat confusingly – also joined by *Synthesis* producer Will B Hunt. The latter flips between electronic percussion and synths, occasionally embarking on a playful drum duel with his namesake. Although fun to watch, the camaraderie between the pair sometimes distracts from the sombre tone of everyone else's performance.

Some might argue that Amy could have easily carried the show without the rest of the band, but they would be missing the point of tonight's performance; this is *Evanescence* with orchestra, not a solo show or a classical experience.

As the set draws to a close, the crowd are treated to three bonus tracks including Amy's haunting solo ballad *Speak To Me* from spooky thriller *Voice From The Stone*. Although her own voice falters during some of the song's more passionate moments, her musicianship and stage presence are mesmerising. A stunning version of *Swimming Home*, originally from the band's 2011 self-titled album, wraps up the show and as the final notes unfold, there's a well-deserved standing ovation. There are many musical paths that Evanescence could take from here, but whether they choose to revisit the orchestral dalliances of this tour remain to be seen. Despite the niggles, *Synthesis* works magnificently live, and tonight is a reaffirmation of Evanescence's towering presence in the modern dark music scene.

NATASHA SCHARF

8

THE AUDIENCE ARE COMPLETELY TRANSFIXED

Amy Lee delivers a noteworthy performance

Inferno's black-clad masses give the colourful a wide berth

Emperor's Ihsahn: black metal's one true wizard

Sinistro bring daring and drama to Inferno

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Emperor and Satyricon crown Norway's flagship metalfest

THURSDAY

Now in its 17th year, Inferno Festival's ongoing ability to attract extreme metal's most venerable names has made it both the flagship event for Norwegian black metal and a weathervane for the health of the scene as a whole. So it's uplifting to discover that, after a few lean years in the 2010s, this year has sold out, bringing in more mixed, if still dedicated crowds and a more relaxed vibe than ever before. Amidst a busy Rockefeller full of early-comers, Sweden's **NAGLFAR [7]** offer a sturdy demonstration of mid-placed black metal, layering thick, friction-inducing riffs over grimly determined grooves. Downstairs in the John Dee venue, **DODECAHEDRON [8]** remap black metal into tempestuous new territory, taking hints of Deathspell Omega's compound-eye tumult but driving hulking great grooves through its heart. Sweden's **SHINING [7]** are less prone to shock tactics these days, but if Niklas Kvarforth's clean vocals are a bit wonky on the night, he's still a provocative and compelling frontman, as the band switch between belligerent, surging backdrop to his crowd-cajoling rants and progressive flourishes that are part post-mania come-down, part 5am moment of reckoning.

As lobster-amoured as Immortal but never stepping out into either comparable moments of absurdism or outright brilliance, **DARK FUNERAL**'s **[6]** blizzard-ripped black metal still holds a huge gravitational pull, their set amassing a crowd like a legion of footsoldiers. But this is still route-one stuff with little inclination to engage the genre's higher functions. **ONE TAIL, ONE HEAD [8]** offer some genuine, bellicose attitude and well-timed dynamics to accentuate their sonic assault, sending a dedicated John Dee crowd into a frenzy. Armed with three chords, decades' worth of experience and a killer PA, **OBITUARY [9]** offer a masterclass you wish every band across the death metal spectrum could witness at least once. Classics of churning, flesh-tearing groove such as *Chopped In Half* and *Slowly We Rot* echo throughout all ages of fist-raising punters.

FRIDAY

Iceland's dapper **AUÐN [8]** unleash a vast, romantic sweep that resonates with their native landscape, but remains rooted enough in 90s, Nordic-style BM to stop them slipping into post- territories. *Í Hálmstráið Held*'s breakout riff is an internal filament charged to incandescently glorious levels as it mesmerises the main stage. **WIEGEDOOD [8]** feel more like a personal purge, the arterial riffs wracking frontman Levy Seynaeve's body until they reach an epic crescendo. **ORIGIN**'s **[8]** bassist Mike Flores's

SETLIST

EMPEROR

Alsvartr (The Oath)
Ye Entrancemperium
Thus Spake The Nightspirit
Ensorcelled By Khaos
The Loss And Curse Of Reverence
The Acclamation Of Bonds With Strength I Burn
The Wanderer

ENCORE

Curse You All Men!
The Majesty Of The Nightsky
I Am The Black Wizards
Inno A Satana

Setlist

SATYRICON

Midnight Serpent
Our World, It Rumbles Tonight
Black Crow On A Tombstone
Deep Calleth Upon Deep
Walker Upon The Wind
Repined Bastard Nation
Die By My Hand
The Wolfpack
Now, Diabolical
To Your Brethren In The Dark
Black Wings And Withering Gloom
Walk The Path Of Sorrow
Transcendental Requiem Of Slaves
Mother North

ENCORE

The Pentagram Burns
Fuel For Hatred
K.I.N.G.

Satyricon: Satyr Wongraven calls upon his deepest reserves of energy

Dark Funeral: black metal on a big scale

SATYRICON ARE ON IMPERIOUS AND EXHILARATING FORM

Fleshgod Apocalypse: operatic for the people

five-string, finger-tapping frenzy is part motor for arguably the most insane tech-death band in existence. The rapid-fire riffs and rhythms feel like boxing with a cubist kangaroo and the only rational response is outright delirium.

Long before **EMPEROR [9]** have even taken the stage, all three levels of the Rockefeller are so packed that, in the likely event that you do shed a tear, you'll be literally hard pressed to wipe it away. Playing *Anthems To The Welkin In Dusk* in full, the swirling, turbulent dynamics are both elemental in their scope and urgency and a sensation that you've opened the crypt to black metal's inner sanctum. Ihsahn makes for a serene eye of the storm, and Samoth a sage-like sentinel for this most other of frequencies, as *Thus Spake The Nightspirit* summons up a typhoon to draw out the spectral keyboards. The huge Emperor logo gives way to Costin Chioreanu's stark, elegant visuals as *I Am The Black Wizards* and a closing *Inno A Satana* carves yet more fiery neural networks into the rapt crowd.

FLESHGOD APOCALYPSE [7] reach their own state of bewildering grandeur, complete with staff-bearing opera singer, 18th-century decadent aristocrat aesthetic and a bombastic take on DM given added oddness by a keyboard player ripped straight from a Hammer Horror movie.

SATURDAY

Gaahls Wyrd bassist Frode Kilvik manages to channel **KRAKOW**'s **[8]** slow-burn while clearly channelling Steve Harris onstage and steers both band and crowd into the most exhilarating of crescendos. In the John Dee downstairs, **SINISTRO [9]** make for one of Inferno's most unforgettable sets, Patrícia Andrade's visceral performance, body wracked as if in stop-motion, and root-you-to-the-spot vocals navigate the funeral doom towards an emotionally devastating destination. **MEMORIAM [8]** are a coarse corrective to everything else on offer. Karl Willetts' gruff, forthright vocals channel a very British, decorum-destroying attack on the world's ills, backed up by old-school riffs you could get tetanus from.

Somewhat more refined, **IHSAHN**'s **[9]** return under his own banner is yet more proof of a creative fire with seemingly unlimited resources. New song *Arcana Imperii* combines far-sighted grace with driving, progressive grooves, and *Frozen Lakes On Mars* welcomes back saxophonist Jurgen Mønkeby as it spirals through exhilarating sonic terrain, helmed in the poised style of a true grand master. Even by their own high standards, **SATYRICON [9]** are on imperious and exhilarating form tonight. From *Midnight Serpent* through *Repined Bastard Nation*, to the closing *K.I.N.G*, this is black metal as ruthlessly efficient litany and show of will, cohered into something momentous. Satyr (who's flu-ridden, it transpires later) rules over a packed house for nearly two hours, even non-fans admitting this is one of the festival's great performances.

Napalm Death: schoolboy terror

SUNDAY

The final day comes with a visitation from extreme metal royalty, black metal bastions **TSJUDER [8]** welcoming original Bathory bassist Frederick Melander for three raging cover tracks – *Born For Burning, Satan My Master* and *Sacrifce* – as the infamous goat logo is emblazoned onstage, and gasps of gratitude are echoed around the arena. Featuring members of Misþyrming, Icelandic black metallers **NAÐRA [8]** play out of their skin as if they've just dug their way up from Hades. Still as galvanising as ever, **NAPALM DEATH [8]** could probably play at WOMAD and fit right in, such is their ability to shackle any context to their perennial blast, and downstairs, **SCHAMMASCH**'s **[8]** blackened yet gilded velocity induces a mind-melting g-force and a room full of dropped jaws. Relying more on groove than stupefied atmosphere these days, **ELECTRIC WIZARD [8]** still bedazzle an ecstatic crowd, not least with the occult soft porn projected behind. But those huge, loping grooves build up in momentum and a final, time-and-space-fusing *Funeralopolis*, backed by spectacular psychedelic, apocalyptic imagery induces a mass retinal meltdown. A man whose demons have been largely personal, Nattefrost's long-awaited return to the stage with **CARPATHIAN FOREST [7]** is, thankfully, a solidly entertaining end to Inferno – despite a quizzical cover of The Cure's *A Forest*. The likes of *The Woods Of Wallachia* lance the True Norwegian BM boil, but it's the punk-fuelled final tracks (plus new song *Rock'n'Roll Gloryhole*) that crown Inferno in full-on party vibe.

JONATHAN SELZER

FALK-HAGEN BERNHAUSEN

Carpenter Brut: purveyors of digital delirium

CARPENTER BRUT

YOUTH CODE

KOKO, LONDON

Actually, the future's red

France's synthwave guru goes into ecstatic overdrive

INSPIRED BY 80s cinema and the decade's obsession with excess with an evocative sound sitting somewhere between EDM maestro Justice and *Escape From New York*-era John Carpenter, Franck 'Carpenter Brut' Hueso (alongside key acts like Pertubator and GosT) is riding high on the synthwave tsunami that's currently flooding the modern underground scene – with many metalheads appreciating and feeling the influence of their beloved genre in both the imagery and music. And given the number of punters desperately pacing the streets looking for a way in, he's undoubtedly the hot ticket on the block.

Given the buzz surrounding this sold-out show, the sparse crowd assembled for **YOUTH CODE [8]** is a jarring sight. Not that it seems to dissuade the LA duo, whose greeting of "Let's fuck this place up" is the jump-off point for a plethora of industrial-powered beats infused with hardcore angst. Ripping and roaring through *Commitment To Complications* and *For I Am Cursed*, vocalist Sara Taylor stomps, stalks and windmills over every inch of available space, her caustic screams halting only during mid-set technical difficulties – during which she pokes fun at partner-in-discordant-crime and synth guru/programmer Ryan George ("Did you rock too hard? You ding-dong!" – and her impromptu venue-wide birthday shout-out. Propulsive rhythms grapple with demented synths during *Carried Mask*, leaving an exhilarated audience craving another brutal dose of the hellish soundscapes borne out of YC's warped sonic dystopia.

Koko's capacity has swelled to unfathomable levels in the brief changeover, and with good reason – for **CARPENTER BRUT [9]** are on resplendent form. From the anarchic blast signalling the twisted enigma's onstage arrival to the schlock-rocking beats of closer *Hairspray Hurricane*, the next 70-odd minutes fly by in a neon blaze of eye-popping visuals and melodies so pervasive that surrendering one's body to the embrace of synthesized beats proves irresistible. Each of the 17 songs making up tonight's surreal soundtrack is accompanied by big-screen images ranging from glorious b-movie schtick (*Turbo Killer*) to the soft-porn proclivities of gore-filled *Sex Killer On The Loose*. A strobe-lit rendition of *Cheerleader Effect* deftly combines experimentation with classic electronica; the heady marriage of Ulver talisman Kristoffer Rygg's sensuous timbre – via backing track – and CB's quintessential groove ramping the danceability factor up to 11, but perhaps the biggest celebration-cum-singalong is reserved for a rampaging version of timeless Michael Sembello hit *Maniac*, which all but lifts the venue roof. Welcome back to the future.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

SETLIST

Leather Teeth
Division Ruine
Roller Mobster
Beware The Beast
Wake Up The President
Chew Bubblegum And Kick Ass
Turbo Killer
Paradise Warfare
Cheerleader Effect
Meet Matt Stryker
Monday Hunt
Inferno Galore
Sexkiller On The Loose
Disco Zombi Italia
Hairspray Hurricane

ENCORE

Le Perv
Maniac

DEEZ NUTS
TRASH TALK

UNDERWORLD, LONDON

You'd struggle to find a band better suited to shaking off the Sunday slumber than **TRASH TALK [8]**. Within seconds frontman Lee Spielman is demanding fist pumps "like we're Motörhead" and stage-dives from everyone in the room to *Walking Disease*, before he head-walks across the room to *Hash Wednesday*. It's capped off with Lee pinning himself to a support pole and commanding a circlepit around him, and a stage invasion to *Revelation* that sees him surfing atop his crowd. It's a batshit role-reversal to end a brilliant set. **DEEZ NUTS [5]**, meanwhile, falter. Old hits still drag the mosh goblins out, but newer material garners a far more muted reaction. Their bro-core was once a dumb-fun sesh-starter, but a decade of bro-hugs and boozing has taken its toll on JJ Peters, who is seemingly gargling gravel tonight. Career highlights like *Band Of Brothers* still hit hard, but by the time *Your Mother Should've Swallowed You* and a half-hearted encore of *Rep Your Hood* close proceedings, Deez Nuts' party trick has worn thin.

TOM CONNICK

HOLDING ABSENCE
LOATHE

THE ANVIL, BOURNEMOUTH

LOATHE [8] are one of the UK's best metalcore bands. Any doubts about that are obliterated when the quartet violently kickstart this duology of hardcore-tinged anarchy. Their penchant for eclectic mania is foregrounded as they roar to life with the dissonant grooves of *Servant And Master*, followed by the Code Orange-meets-Deftones immensity of *It's Yours* and *Dance On My Skin*. The Liverpudlians unite diversity with tight, undying power, resulting in a volatile crowd that's eager to explode into a frenzy at every moment. Loathe's grinding grit is contrasted by **HOLDING ABSENCE [8]**, whose ambient anthems are bolstered by heavenly vocals. The clean-cut maestros shine with the enveloping opener *A Godsend*, before descending into heavier territory with new bruiser *Perish*. Their small handful of breakdowns and raspy yells elicit enthusiastic pits from a sold-out Anvil, the environment giving ballads like *Everything* a heaviness that was previously unrealised. The future of British metal is in safe hands.

MATT MILLS

Helzapoppin have some of the best hooks in the business

Avatar's Johannes Eckerström offers thrills and frills

AVATAR
HELLZAPOPPIN

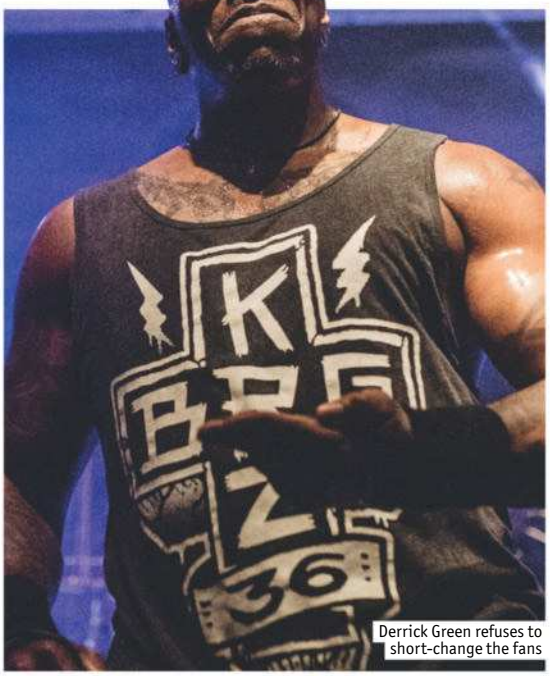
ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

Circus-invoking Swedes return in regal style

HELLZAPOPPIN [7] AREN'T your usual support act. The "rock'n'roll freakshow" deliver stunts that have the crowd howling with nervous laughter while simultaneously testing their gag reflexes. Ryan Stock dangles three cowbells and a bowling ball from hooks levered into his eyelids, Nik Sin ("The World's Smallest Escape Artist") swallows a fully inflated balloon, and half-man daredevil Short E. Dangerously gleefully bounces on his hands on a table covered in broken glass. It eventually collapses, dumping him – and its treacherous contents – onto the stage.

After a prolonged period of careful broomwork, **AVATAR [8]** arrive in style. Shoehorning an arena-sized production into a municipal town hall might have been a challenge, but as a gilded throne slowly ascends behind the drumkit, carrying be-crowned guitarist Jonas 'The King' Jarlsby towards the rafters, it's apparent the expense and effort was worth it. A delirious set follows, replete with savagely precise guitar work, demented, thumping riffs and championship-level choreographed headbanging. From the Peter Green-inspired introduction to *Let It Burn* to the heavy metal hoedown of *The King Welcomes You To Avatar Country* – as fairy lights turn the room into a deranged barndance and the sprung floor bounces – it's thrillingly insane. And it's all brilliantly marshalled by Johannes Eckerström, half circus ringmaster, half mischievous court jester, and 100% pomp and devilry. As the crowd leaves, someone screams that Avatar are "the best band in the fucking world." This feels like a coronation.

FRASER LEWRY



Derrick Green refuses to short-change the fans

Andreas Kisser: pretty good at licks too

SEPULTURA
OBSCURA/GOATWHORE/FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY

KOKO, LONDON

Groove-laden metal maestros celebrate two decades

"HOW THE FUCK are you doin', London?" booms Joe Badolato before ripping into a slab of crushing deathcore. Openers they might be, but New Jersey marauders **FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY [8]** have come to tear the Koko in half. Bullets of incredible force rain down during *Heads Will Hang*, unravelling into the bleak misgivings of *Saltwound*. **GOATWHORE**'s **[7]** thrashy whirlwind of blackened death summons old-school hedonism to the bill despite Ben Falgoust's broken foot rendering him immobile. A shout-out goes out to the "Pit troll" on the floor who's fireman lifting a queue of moshers waiting to crowdsurf. To follow, **OBSCURA [7]** bring a wallop of blistering metal that showcases the most technically brilliant hooks of the night.

Max who? Celebrating the 20-year anniversary of Derrick Green's inauguration into the **SEPULTURA [9]** family, the roots of this band seem like a distant memory. Derrick's mix of insouciant cool and terrifying horsepower is the riding force, catapulted by Andreas Kisser's instrumental magic, and while their earnest bid to keep Sepultura fresh results in a mild eyebrow raise during the sung part of *Machine Messiah* it proves Derrick's versatility as a vocalist. Not to upset any diehards, there's a tide of Cavalera-era classics, from the flykicking *Desperate Cry* to a closing triple-whammy of *Slave New World, Ratamahatta* and, of course, *Roots Bloody Roots* where the crowd – and judging from their grins, the band too – are having the time of their bloody lives.

HOLLY WRIGHT

CARPENTER BRUT: KEVIN NIXON/AVATAR: WILL IRELAND/SEPULTURA: JAKE OWENS

WHEN TESTAMENT CLICK, THEY ARE IMMENSE

Why would anyone want a bass solo when you can have Chuck Billy belting out the classics?

TESTAMENT

ANNIHILATOR, VADER

MOTION, BRISTOL

Annihilator steal the night from the mighty headliners

Oakland's thrash heroes veer from the script

WITH INVERTED CROSSES, leather and studs and Piotr Wiwczarek's Stuka bomber solos ringing out from the suffocating smoke, **VADER [7]** deliver everything you would hope from death metal elder statesmen on this night of old-school celebration. But what sets them apart is just how much the Poles seem to enjoy themselves as they hurtle through the piercing riffs of *Send Me Back To Hell*.

Fun is clearly **ANNIHILATOR**'s **[8]** trump card as the Canadians' latest incarnation whip up the first pits of the evening and get the crowd to chant along giddily to *Alison Hell* and *Phantasmagoria*. While Jeff Waters has never been the genre's most celebrated frontman, his agitated stage moves and boundless enthusiasm are truly infectious.

TESTAMENT [6], on the other hand, don't get off to the best start, with a terrible mix dominated by Gene Hoglan's artillery bombardment and some sloppily timed CO_2 jets that prevent excellent new tracks *Brotherhood Of The Snake* and *The Pale King* from gaining much traction, and incredibly for such an accomplished band there are even moments during the set where things get a bit sloppy. The most pivotal moment comes with Alex Skolnick's impressive solo spot, as entertaining classic rock riffs are interspersed with dazzling runs and the dexterous playing he's become so lauded for. Though it does reset the dials ready for a stirring *Electric Crown*, it makes a rod for the band's back as each musician takes their turn at centre stage. And while it's fun to hear Gene blast through *Raining Blood*, by the time Steve Di Giorgio and his bass are left alone front and centre there's a collective groan, followed by the muddled instrumental *Urotsukidôji*. While you could gripe at any band failing to play your favourites live, the sheer number of Testament classics that are passed up in favour of these momentum-stalling solos is achingly infuriating. Because when Testament click, they are immense. Whether it's undeniable new tracks like *Stronghold*, the rarely aired colossus *Low* or the aural violence of *Into The Pit*, Eric Peterson's trademark riffs and the mammoth presence of Chuck Billy and his air-guitar antics is enough to forget any misdemeanours. Ending with a triumphant trip down memory lane with *Practice What You Preach* and *Disciples Of The Watch*, the crowd are swept up by the wave of pure exhilaration as one of the most legendary thrash bands to ever do it make it all look so easy… once they stop showing off.

ADAM REES

SETLIST

Brotherhood of the Snake
Rise Up
The Pale King
More Than Meets The Eye
Centuries Of Suffering
Electric Crown
Into The Pit
Stronghold
Throne Of Thorns
D.N.R. (Do Not Resuscitate)
Eyes Of Wrath
Drum Solo
First Strike Is Deadly
Bass Solo
Urotsukidôji
Souls Of Black
The New Order

ENCORE
Practice What You Preach
Disciples Of The Watch

BUCKFEST

REBELLION, MANCHESTER

Bringing a party of mayhem in aid of Teenage Cancer Trust, Buckfest 2018 has the riffs hitting hard right from the off, but the all-day event really blasts into overdrive through the blistering ferocity of **HELLRIPPER [7]**. Their classic blackened speed metal keeps the momentum flowing in top gear, causing heads to bang aplenty as they provide bout after bout of sharp riffing and face-melting solos. Upping the ante with their monstrous DM, **ABHORRENT DECIMATION [8]** give one hell of a performance. The dual riffing of Will Cooke and Ross McLennan brings sustained sonic devastation while Ashley Scott's charismatic stage presence and gut-busting vocals rattle the rafters. **XENTRIX [7]** may be two decades deep into their career, but they show no signs of fatigue. Kristian Havard and Jay Walsh's pummelling riffs keep the adrenaline pumping, and Kristian's gruff vocals sound sharp. A classy performance that ensures Buckfest ends on a resounding high.

JAMES WEAVER

NE OBLIVISCARIS

ALLEGAEON/VIRVUM

THE DOME, LONDON

VIRVUM [8] are astoundingly good for an opening band, stirring up a wall with extra-string guitars. **ALLEGAEON [6]** don't quite hit the mark, but their boisterous nerdisms add a beer-sploshed explosion to the complicated noodling on offer. The last time **NE OBLIVISCARIS [9]** played The Dome it was half empty, but tonight is a different story. "This is one of the biggest headline shows we've ever done," says violinist and vocalist Tim Charles. They open with grandiose new track *Libera Part 1: Saturnine Spheres*, the two singers immediately symbolising the yin and yang of this band: the waspish, dark mystery of Xen and the charismatic multi-talents of Tim. Their set is immensely powerful, taking deep strides into blackened progressive metal. Tim's fiancée guests on *Eyrie* and together they play a violin duet, while *Painters Of The Tempest Part 2: Triptych Lux* provokes a roar of approval as it blazes a trail of tight musicianship from every side of the stage, brushed with brutal majesty. *Devour Me, Colossus* closes their set in a bloodbath of unifying joy.

HOLLY WRIGHT

TESTAMENT: DUNCAN EVERSON/CANNIBAL CORPSE: MARK LEARY/MYLES KENNEDY: MARIE KORNER

The Black Dahlia Murder's Trevor Strnad whips up the 'pit

Corpsegrinder looks like he's about to pop a blood vessel in his neck. Or rather, he would if he had one...

CANNIBAL CORPSE

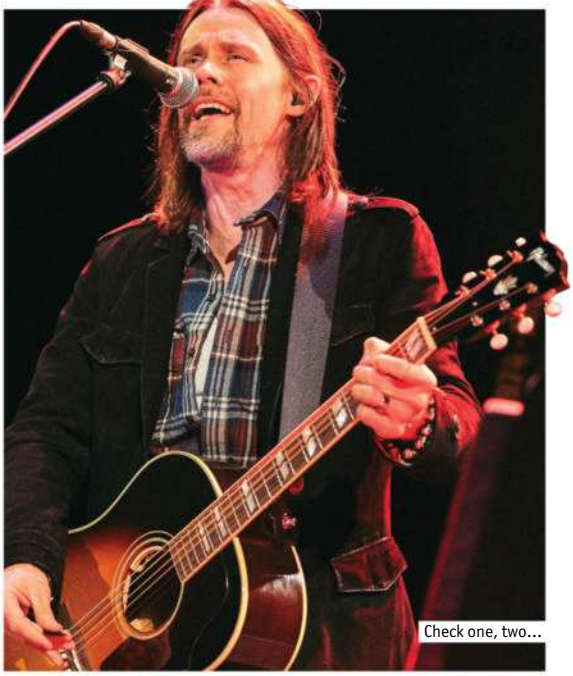
THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER

ROCK CITY, NOTTINGHAM

Death metal legends prove they still mean business

NOTTINGHAM MAY RESEMBLE an Immortal album cover, but that hasn't stopped people from coming out in force for this sold-out show. Striding out to a huge cheer, **THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER [7]** strike with ruthless efficiency, tearing through a taut, punchy set mostly drawn from their most recent *Nightbringer* opus. *Widowmaker* instantly gets heads banging, and while the energy levels seem to dip mid-set, when they plough into older songs like *Warborn*, the crowd is whipped into a frenzy all over again. If TBDM are a well-oiled machine, **CANNIBAL CORPSE [8]** are a merciless, Skynet-created cyborg. After three decades, the allure of that distinctive groove hasn't waned in the slightest. The menacing mid-tempo chug of *Code Of The Slashers* works surprisingly well as an opener, and after battering us with several tracks from *Red Before Black*, the steady, pummelling pulse of *Evisceration Plague* drops the tempo and makes the whole room look like a sea of wildly flailing barnets. George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher looks like he's going to pop a blood vessel during older tracks like *The Wretched Spawn* and *Pounded Into Dust*. After a gleefully punishing combo of *A Skull Full Of Maggots, I Cum Blood* and *Make Them Suffer*, the band promise us one more, and invite TBDM's Trevor Strnad out for a vocal tag-team during *Stripped, Raped And Strangled*. Nobody's complaining when they break that promise mere minutes later, as the inevitable *Hammer Smashed Face* ends the night on a sweaty, gore-soaked high.

KEZ WHELAN



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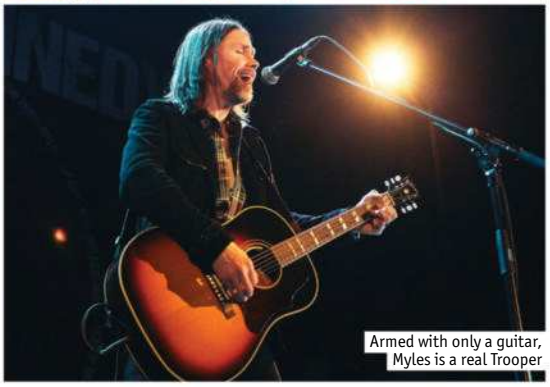

Armed with only a guitar, Myles is a real Trooper

MYLES KENNEDY

ISLINGTON TOWN HALL, LONDON

Alter Bridge frontman discovers a charmed solo existence

THERE'S A TENDENCY to scoff at frontmen of sizable rock acts going on solo tours armed with nothing but an acoustic guitar as an overly earnest exercise in self-congratulatory ego boosting. So, in the case of Alter Bridge's frontman Myles Kennedy – a man who is known for being a nice, normal guy with an exceptional voice – you probably wouldn't be expecting a night of fireworks and rock'n'roll excess. What we get instead is a musician operating at the very top of his craft and an incredibly likeable and surprisingly funny gentleman between songs. Whether it's impersonating Barry White or fielding the high-pitched heckles of an adoring crowd, Myles is genuinely engaging company. But it's when the chat ends and he plays that this evening really flies. By this point, pointing out that Myles Kennedy is a decent vocalist is up there with asserting that water is wet, but hearing him hit those notes on *Starlight* with only an acoustic guitar behind him is so powerful that it almost pins you back against the wall. It is also worth pointing out how adept he is on the guitar – taking mammoth riffs written by Mark Tremonti and making them workable in this environment is no easy task. The highlight of the evening comes when Myles takes *The Trooper* and turns it into a Johnny Cash-style, gangster country lament, a point that everything comes together in glorious style. Naysayers be warned: this is no ego trip, just an evening of great music and company.

8

STEPHEN HILL

BLITZKRIEG - JUDGE NOT!

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9/10 POWERPLAY (UK)

THORIUM - BLASPHEMY AWAKES

"THORIUM ARE BACK WITH A VENGEANCE, SUPPLYING US WITH A LETHAL DOZE OF RAZOR-SHARP RIFFS, STEAMING GROOVE AND TEMPTING MELODIC, WHO WILL LEAD YOU INTO THE ABYSS", DEAF FOREVER (DE)
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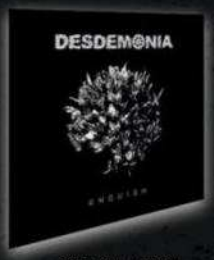

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LIVE EVIL

APRIL 26 • 2018 • 2018

WE CAME AS ROMANS

The *Cold Like War* hammer aims for the UK this summer

AFTER 10 YEARS OF TOURING, WHAT'S BEEN YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT?

Joshua Moore (guitar): "We played our hometown show in Detroit on our first Warped Tour in 2011 and all our families came out to see us. I saw my dad getting all teary-eyed in the crowd and I started crying onstage. He was so proud of how far we'd come from playing shows to five people and that day was our biggest show so far; there were about 7,000 people there."

HOW WEIRD DO WCAR SHOWS GET THESE DAYS?

"Our bass player Andy [Glass] is one of the sweatiest humans alive. After a set, he's so wet he looks like he's taken a shower. One night, he wiped his face and arms with a towel and threw it into the crowd. A girl grabs it and immediately brings it to her face and deeply inhales the sweat-drenched towel. I think that was her aim all along so at least she's setting goals and achieving the big things in life."

WHAT'S THE BEST TOUR PRANK YOU'VE EVER PULLED?

"In 2011, we were opening for Pierce The Veil, Bring Me The Horizon and A Day To Remember. Every night A Day To Remember tied 300 balloons to the ceiling so they could release them during their last song. One night, whoever was in charge of tying the release rope didn't fasten it well enough, and their balloons dropped during our last song. It looked like we'd planned it. They put a fake angry note on our dressing room door saying they were going to kick us off the tour, so on the last day during their set, we put 200 balloons in their dressing room with a note saying, 'Here are your balloons, we thought we'd give them back!'"

YOU'RE BACK IN THE UK IN MAY. HOW HAVE UK CROWDS TREATED YOU BEFORE?

"We've played in front of so many people at UK festivals but for some reason whenever we transitioned to club shows, it didn't sell well. Since *Cold Like War*, we've seen the pre-sale figures for our UK dates and they're already better than we've ever done before! It seems like the album is translating really well so we're excited to see what you guys think when we get back to the clubs."

ACT OF DEFIANCE

JUL 27 LONDON UNDERWORLD
JUL 29 GLASGOW CATHOUSE
JUL 30 NEWCASTLE THINK TANK
AUG 1 CHESTER LIVE ROOMS
AUG 2 MILTON KEYNES CRAUFORD ARMS

ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL
GLASSJAW, GIRAFFES? GIRAFFES!, ROLO TOMASSI, SVALBARD, ZEAL & ARDOR, BLACK PEAKS, ALCEST + MORE

AUG 16-18 BRISTOL FERNHILL FARM

HAMMER PRESENTS

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
JUDAS PRIEST, NIGHTWISH, GOJIRA, EMPEROR, DORO, WATAIN, NAILS, DEVILDRIVER, COMBICHRIST, SEPTICFLESH, BLOODBATH, FOZZY + MORE

AUG 9-12 DERBYSHIRE CATTON HALL

CLUTCH

DEC 18 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
DEC 19 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
DEC 20 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
DEC 21 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
DEC 22 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY

DANZIG

AUG 6 GLASGOW BARROWLANDS
AUG 7 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON

HAMMER PRESENTS

DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL
AVENGED SEVENFOLD, GUNS N' ROSES, OZZY, MARILYN MANSON, BFMV, PARKWAY DRIVE, BABYMETAL, ASKING ALEXANDRIA, MESHUGGAH, RISE AGAINST + MORE

JUNE 8-10 DERBYSHIRE DONINGTON PARK

DEF LEPPARD
CHEAP TRICK

DEC 1 DUBLIN 3 ARENA
DEC 2 BELFAST SSE ARENA
DEC 4 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA
DEC 6 LONDON O2 ARENA
DEC 8 NOTTINGHAM MOTORPOINT ARENA
DEC 9 NEWCASTLE METRO RADIO ARENA
DEC 11 GLASGOW SSE HYDRO ARENA
DEC 12 MANCHESTER ARENA
DEC 14 SHEFFIELD FLYDSA ARENA
DEC 15 LIVERPOOL ECHO ARENA
DEC 17 BIRMINGHAM ARENA

EUROPE

SEP 14 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
SEP 15 GLASGOW BARROWLAND
SEP 17 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
SEP 18 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
SEP 19 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
SEP 21 CARDIFF ST DAVID'S HALL
SEP 22 PORTSMOUTH THE PYRAMID CENTRE
SEP 23 LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL
SEP 24 BRIGHTON DOME

GLASSJAW

AUG 18 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

HALESTORM

SEP 19 DUBLIN ACADEMY
SEP 20 BELFAST THE TELEGRAPH BUILDING
SEP 22 SHEFFIELD O2 ACADEMY
SEP 23 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
SEP 24 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
SEP 26 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
SEP 28 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
SEP 29 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY

HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES
THE DARKNESS
THE DAMNED

JUN 16 BIRMINGHAM GENTING ARENA
JUN 17 MANCHESTER ARENA
JUN 19 GLASGOW SSE HYDRO
JUN 20 LONDON SSE WEMBLEY ARENA

IRON MAIDEN
KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

JUL 31 NEWCASTLE METRO RADIO ARENA
AUG 2 BELFAST SSE ARENA

GETTY

MARIE KORNER

AUG 4 ABERDEEN EXHIB. & CONF. CENTRE
AUG 6 MANCHESTER ARENA
AUG 7 BIRMINGHAM GENTING ARENA
AUG 10 LONDON O2 ARENA
AUG 11 LONDON O2 ARENA

MACHINE HEAD

MAY 13 SOUTHAMPTON GUILDHALL
MAY 14 CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
MAY 15 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
MAY 17 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
MAY 18 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
MAY 19 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
MAY 21 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
MAY 22 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
MAY 23 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
MAY 25 MANCHESTER ACADEMY

MINISTRY
CHELSEA WOLFE

JUL 17 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
JUL 18 GLASGOW O2 ABC
JUL 20 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
JUL 21 LONDON THE FORUM
JUL 23 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
JUL 24 DUBLIN TIVOLI
JUL 25 BRISTOL SWX

MONSTER MAGNET

JUN 1 GLASGOW GARAGE
JUN 2 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
JUN 4 DUBLIN TIVOLI

POWERWOLF
AMARANTHE
KISSIN' DYNAMITE

NOV 12 LONDON KOKO

SAXON

OCT 18 GLASGOW BARROWLANDS
OCT 19 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
OCT 20 PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
OCT 21 MANCHESTER ACADEMY

STONE FREE FESTIVAL
SCORPIONS, MEGADETH, YES, BUCKCHERRY, ORANGE GOBLIN, STONE BROKEN, TYKETTO, ANATHEMA, WARRIOR SOUL, GINGER WILDHEART + MORE

JUNE 16-17 LONDON O2 ARENA

TECHFEST
PROTEST THE HERO, SIKTH, THE ACACIA STRAIN, NORMA JEAN, THE CONTORTIONIST, VOLA, CYCLAMEN, DVSR + MORE

JULY 5-9 NEWARK SHOWGROUND

THE BRONX

JUN 9 MANCHESTER GORILLA
JUN 10 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM

TREMONTI

JUN 28 GLASGOW ABC
JUN 29 LONDON SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE
JUN 30 BIRMINGHAM INSTITUTE
JUL 2 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
JUL 3 DUBLIN ACADEMY
JUL 5 PORTSMOUTH PYRAMIDS

WE CAME AS ROMANS
ALAZKA, POLARIS

MAY 2 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
MAY 3 BRISTOL FLEECE
MAY 4 GLASGOW CATHOUSE
MAY 5 MANCHESTER NIGHT PEOPLE
MAY 6 LEEDS KEY CLUB
MAY 8 LONDON UNDERWORLD

HAMMER PRESENTS
WITHIN TEMPTATION

NOV 9 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
NOV 10 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
NOV 11 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
NOV 13 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

BUCKCHERRY

Stone Free's party is about to get *Lit Up*

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY OF TOURING SO FAR, JOSH?

Josh Todd (vocals): "The first time we came to Europe, our manager worked with Kiss so we got their opening slot. We'd never been on an arena stage before; we'd never even been on a tourbus, we were still in a van. Every night the Kiss crew guys were trying to scare us by saying the Kiss fans would boo us and throw piss at us. Every night we were terrified before we went onstage but luckily it was such an amazing experience and to this day, I still see people from that tour coming out to our shows."

WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING YOU'VE SEEN HAPPEN AT A BUCKCHERRY SHOW?

"A lot of fucking! One time, this couple were up against the front barriers and I could tell they were plotting something the entire show so as soon as we got to *Crazy Bitch*, it happened. I used to have a guitar tech with a really big dick and almost every night, he'd pull his pants down and wait for me to notice he was side-stage with his dick out. Also, I once signed some guy's dick in Europe!"

IS TOURING STILL PRETTY CRAZY FOR YOU GUYS THESE DAYS?

"You'll think we're boring but we like to lay low on tour and use days off to write songs for our new album this year. I'm really focused on taking care of my voice so I'm always in bed before everyone else. Me and Stevie D [guitar] like to grab some good food and go to the movies. Sean [Winchester, drums] also leaves a lot of stuff out everywhere on the bus so Gregg Cash [bass, Josh Todd And The Conflict] created an Instagram account specifically for @shitseanleaveslayingaround!"

DO YOU TAKE ANY HOME COMFORTS WITH YOU?

"I read a lot so I never leave home without my Kindle. If you tour for a living, you get used to reading a lot because there's a lot of time to waste on planes, trains and automobiles. I always bring something my youngest daughter made for me, too, that's been a long-running theme. She likes to sew so she makes me a pillow or a beanie. I feel like it's bad luck if I don't have something of hers on me at all times."

SUBTERRANEA

AURA NOIR
DEGIAL, TAPHOS

MAY 7 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

CIRITH UNGOL
ANGEL WITCH, NIGHT DEMON, WYTCH HAZEL, AMULET

MAY 12 LONDON UNDERWORLD

GRAILS

MAY 7 LONDON GARAGE
MAY 8 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
MAY 9 LONDON BUSH HALL

INCINERATION FESTIVAL
ABBATH, MASTER'S HAMMER, TAAKE, ROTTING CHRIST, SAOR, HYPOTHERMIA + MORE

MAY 12 LONDON THE DOME

LIGHTNING BOLT
THE BODY, SEX SWING

MAY 7 BRIGHTON THE HAUNT

MIDGARDSBLOT
DIMMU BORGIR, WATAIN, ENSIFERUM, ROTTING CHRIST, HAMFERÐ, ÁRABROT + MORE

AUG 16-18 BORRE MIDGARD HISTORISK SENTER

THE OBSESSED
SIGIRIYA, THE GRUDGE

MAY 6 BRISTOL EXCHANGE

OF THE WAND AND THE MOON

AUG 16 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

RAW POWER
GODFLESH, CIRCLES, GHOLD, 11PARANOIAS, COCAINE PISS, PIGS X 7 + MORE

MAY 25-27 LONDON THE DOME/BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

SADISTIC INTENT

AUG 16 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

WEEDEATER
ASG, LACERTILIA

MAY 7 BRIGHTON THE HAUNT

WIEGEDOOD

MAY 19 BIRMINGHAM ASYLUM 2
MAY 20 BRISTOL THE LOUISIANA
MAY 21 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
MAY 22 LONDON THE BLACK HEART

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NEW SHADES OF BLACK

ARKHON INFAUSTUS
FRENCH FILTHMONGERS INVADE THE UK

ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF
ENTERING THE ECSTATIC

CORPOREAL PUNISHMENT
THE BODY
OREGON'S OUTSIDER ARTISTS REDEFINE 'HEAVY'

The Body (left to right): Lee Buford, Chip King

PICS: SAM GEHRKE

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

A HOPE IN HELL

Oregon-based cult noise merchants The Body have exorcised a terrifying and ever-morphing host of demons over the past 13 years. Now they're about to redefine 'heavy' once more

WORDS: CONNIE GORDON

Lee Buford, drummer for The Body, is deathly afraid of flying. We're talking about a fear so paralysing that, "Whenever we play shows out of the country, Chip [King, vocalist/guitarist] has to take a 'fake me'. Chip flies everywhere, but I get crazy panic attacks and can't. It bums me out because Europe would be great to see, but I never will."

When *Subterranea* proposes hopping on a boat to traverse the Atlantic and bring their experimental doom/sludge/noise to the Old World, Buford's response indicates a more pervasive and generalised dread.

"We actually tried that once. It was not good," he laments. "We were going to play Roadburn which is in April and there aren't many cruise ships running at that time of year, so we took a cargo ship, which rocks way more than a cruise liner. The trip was supposed to take two weeks and when we first got onboard and were going up the coast, it was fine. But once we got into open water, I was like, 'Nope!' We had to get another boat come meet us, get us off the ship and bring us back to the US. We drove down to Philadelphia and taught our friend Matt the set. He and Chip flew over and didn't miss any shows."

On the surface, the above speaks to the impact of common and rational fears. Dig a little and it quickly becomes evident that The Body is Lee's vehicle for the expression of not just those fears, but everything cooped up in his psyche. The band's outward appearance and aesthetic is steeped in despondent anger and negativity, and their creative methodology varies from record to record, but deep down The Body is the sound of Lee hanging on for dear life.

"That's 100% of it," he says. "We have a lot of fun together and we're best friends, but there is a level of 'How do you function in the world?'. People will say our records are angry or scary-sounding, but I don't see that. For me, it's more about trying to deal with living. This new album is darker, but the game plan and aesthetic hasn't changed; it's about just trying to function and the difficulty in doing so. For me, this is normal and what I think people live with every day, but it's not. I have to check myself a lot and remember that most people don't feel like this."

It's fitting, then, that The Body's latest album, *I Have Fought Against It, But I Can't Any Longer* – a paraphrased excerpt from author Virginia Woolf's 1941 suicide note – is a wholesale deconstruction of the concrete, the abstract and all stops in between. This includes anxiety-riddled battles with modernity, an upending of their own creative process, an exploration of personal neuroses and trauma and a redefinition of what heavy means to a heavy band. On previous full-length, 2016's *No One Deserves Happiness*, the pair channelled their affinity for Beyoncé and other chart-toppers in the creation of the "grossest pop album of all time". On *I Have Fought...*, the original goal was to ignore what brought them to doom/sludge metal prominence by having neither member actually play their instruments while mining their love of dub to shatter preconceptions.

> "People say our music's angry, but it's more about trying to deal with living"
>
> LEE BUFORD FINDS EXISTENCE AN UPHILL STRUGGLE

"Originally, we were trying to go in the direction of doing it more electronically, but that was really tough. Chip's guitar isn't sampled and a lot of the drums are drums I've played on other stuff that we just cut up, but not sampled in the hip hop sense. And there's definitely some dancehall influence; I've always liked the heavily reverbed drums on dub stuff, but I feel like we've always had that, it's just more pronounced on this one. It wasn't very conscious. Like all our stuff, it's just a collection of influences. It's just that certain things come out more in some songs than others.

"Most people listen to a wide range of music," he continues. "I've been in bands where it's been, 'This is what we sound like' and it's hard to break free from that. When it's just the two of us, it's easier to say, 'Let's do this' or 'let's do that'. It's definitely multi-dimensional and there isn't any set thing we're supposed to do. It would be awkward if there were."

Twenty-six years ago, Lee was a 14-year old kid hanging around the Fayetteville, Arkansas punk scene when he became acquainted with Chip. Despite the vocalist/guitarist being three years older, the two quickly became chums and creatively inseparable, deciding that adding a frontman, a second guitarist or even a bassist would be a dead-weight hassle, especially when it came to the unfettered exploration of musical avenues.

"I've always felt music doesn't have borders," he asserts. "Even growing up in the punk scene, we loved the crossover with metal. We've always loved all kinds of music and never been like, 'This is what constitutes heavy.'"

The two friends didn't officially come together as The Body until 1999 when they uprooted 2,400km northeast to Providence, Rhode Island – they've since relocated 5,000km west to Portland, Oregon – and, despite accumulating thousands of DIY touring miles under their belts, it wasn't until 2004 when they recorded their four-song demo and debut full-length (both self-titled) that anything was caught on tape. Since then, the floodgates have opened to the tune of more than 25 releases.

"I think [2010's] *All The Waters Of The Earth Turn To Blood* was the first record where we believed we could incorporate different things like a choir, strings and horns and all this production stuff, but still have it have the same effect for us," he recalls.

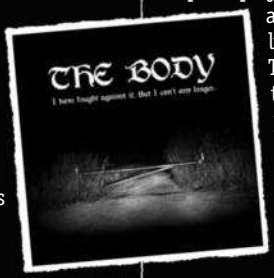
Their discography is not only littered with countless guest appearances, but includes multiple collaborations in which The Body and whichever musical entity they are paired with kinetically redefine one another during the

Lee and Chip rely on people power. And, it seems, petal power...

communal writing and recording process. These associations have had Lee and Chip working with artists as diverse as electronica's The Haxan Cloak and post-rockers Braveyoung to sludge metal kings Thou and grind-noise kiddos Full Of Hell.

"We have ideas for stuff and we find people who can play them because we can't," he laughs, describing the planning for collaborations. "Like for the Full Of Hell records [2016's *One Day You Will Ache Like I Ache* and 2017's *Ascending A Mountain Of Heavy Light*], me and Chip can't play like those guys; like Dave [Bland, Full Of Hell] is an animal as a drummer. But working with a greater number of people means we can just add whatever we're doing to whatever they're doing."

In the same way legacy acts and sonic compatriots like Godflesh, Swans and The Young Gods have upended the process and progress of extreme music via elements like hip hop beats, tormented vocals, heart-eviscerating acoustic guitars and sampler-powered sonic de/reconstruction, *I Have Fought...* subverts traditional notions of heavy. It's hardly about thunderous riffs churned out at an agonising pace, Chip's paint-stripping vocals and noise-splattered rhythms (though that exists) as it is the musical twisting of sound towards uncomfortable hopelessness and emotional claustrophobia.



On their sixth full-length, The Body pick away at hearts, souls and psyches – both the listener's and their own – with dynamics and textural contrast instead of barrelling over all and sundry with a distortion pedal. To the best friends and bandmates, the weirdness and experimentation they get accused of are perfectly sensible and logical moves; their conceptual approach to art is them figuring out how to survive in a world they feel not entirely cut out for. A world where modern conveniences can create more anxiety than calm and where most people can't see the connective tissue between dub, pop, prog-rock and painfully harrowing experimental extreme music.

> "I've always felt music doesn't have borders"
>
> LEE BUFORD ON WHY MUSIC SHOULDN'T LEAVE YOU FEELING TRAPPED

"Listen to *Sgt Pepper*, *Pet Sounds* or *Electric Light Orchestra*," Lee recommends. "There are so many layers to the production and instrumentation. That music has always been our main influence. Sure, I can play drums and Chip can play guitar, but I'll have ideas for strings and I can't sing. So, whenever I write lyrics, I'll get Chrissy Wolpert [of The Assembly Of Light Choir] to sing them. Plus, I like having a female presence as juxtaposition; Chip screaming, Chrissy singing beautifully and having those things playing off each other. It makes things more interesting than two dudes playing guitar and drums. To me, it's a more rewarding listen. At the same time, I get how it's frustrating for some listeners because we started out doomy and sludgy. There are definitely people out there who would rather we keep doing that stuff, but there are a lot of bands doing it way better than we do. It would feel counterproductive to keep going down that route when there are so many different ways of expression." ✠

***I HAVE FOUGHT AGAINST IT, BUT I CAN'T ANY LONGER* IS RELEASED ON MAY 11 VIA THRILL JOCKEY**

SEISMIC MATTERS

Three albums where dub got ultra-heavy

TERMINAL CHEESECAKE
Angels In Pigtails [1990]

Recently resurrected with members of sympathetic detonators, Gnod, Terminal Cheesecake took the late 80s/early 90s dub/noise movement – termed 'arsequake' at the time – to the frayed edges of sanity. Their third album was an absurdist echo chamber, giving rise to the immortal, reverberating refrain, *'What the hell was that beautiful racket?'*

GOD
Possession [1994]

Fronted by Kevin Martin – who went on to relative fame as The Bug – and known for clearing all but the most hardy out of any venue they played within minutes, God's second studio album was a hyper-sensitive colossus that felt like your body trying to contain an information overload, and failing. Reverberating locked grooves pushed back against swathes of corrosive noise, compounding last-ditch defiance and abject desperation.

TECHNO ANIMAL
The Brotherhood Of The Bomb [2001]

A collaboration between Kevin Martin and Godflesh's Justin Broadrick – who'd already signalled his love of the internal-organ-tenderising nature of dub with 1997's remix album, *Love And Hate In Dub* – Techno-Animal were a constantly morphing beast whose final album mixed dancehall, dub and hip hop to create a double album full that sounded like a lava pit burping up urban paranoia and concussion-inducing, depth-charge beats.

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ARMORED SAINT ✶ AT THE GATES ✶ AURA NOIR ✶ AZARATH ✶ BEHEMOTH ✶ BELPHEGOR
THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER ✶ BLEED FROM WITHIN ✶ BLOOD INCANTATION ✶ BÖLZER ✶ BROKEN HOPE
BRUJERIA ✶ CANNIBAL CORPSE ✶ CARNIFEX ✶ CARPATHIAN FOREST ✶ CELESTE ✶ COFFINS ✶ CONVERGE
COUNTERPARTS ✶ CRUACHAN ✶ DANZIG ✶ DEAD CONGREGATION ✶ DIABLO SWING ORCHESTRA
DODECAHEDRON ✶ DRAGGED INTO SUNLIGHT ✶ DYING FETUS ✶ E-FORCE ✶ EXHORDER ✶ FULL OF HELL
GOBLIN ✶ GOJIRA ✶ GRAVE PLEASURES ✶ GRAVEYARD ✶ H2O ✶ HARAKIRI FOR THE SKY ✶ HATE ✶ HELMET
HIRAX ✶ HORKSH ✶ HYPNOS ✶ IHSAHN ✶ INGESTED ✶ INSANITY ALERT ✶ INTEGRITY ✶ JASTA ✶ KUROKUMA
LVMEN ✶ MALOKARPATAN ✶ MARDUK ✶ MINISTRY ✶ MISERY INDEX ✶ MORTIIS ✶ MUNICIPAL WASTE ✶ MYRKUR
NASTY ✶ NEOCAESAR ✶ NOCTURNUS AD ✶ NORTHLANE ✶ NOVEMBERS DOOM ✶ OBSCURE SPHINX ✶ ORIGIN
PAIN ✶ PARADISE LOST ✶ PALLBEARER ✶ PERTURBATOR ✶ PESTILENCE ✶ PILLORIAN ✶ PLINI ✶ PROTECTOR
SADISTIC INTENT ✶ SAINT VITUS ✶ SEPULTURA ✶ TERROR ✶ TORMENTOR ✶ UNLEASHED ✶ UNCURED
✶ UNSANE ✶ WARDRUNA ✶ WHOREDOM RIFE ✶ WIEGEDOOD ✶ WRATHPRAYER

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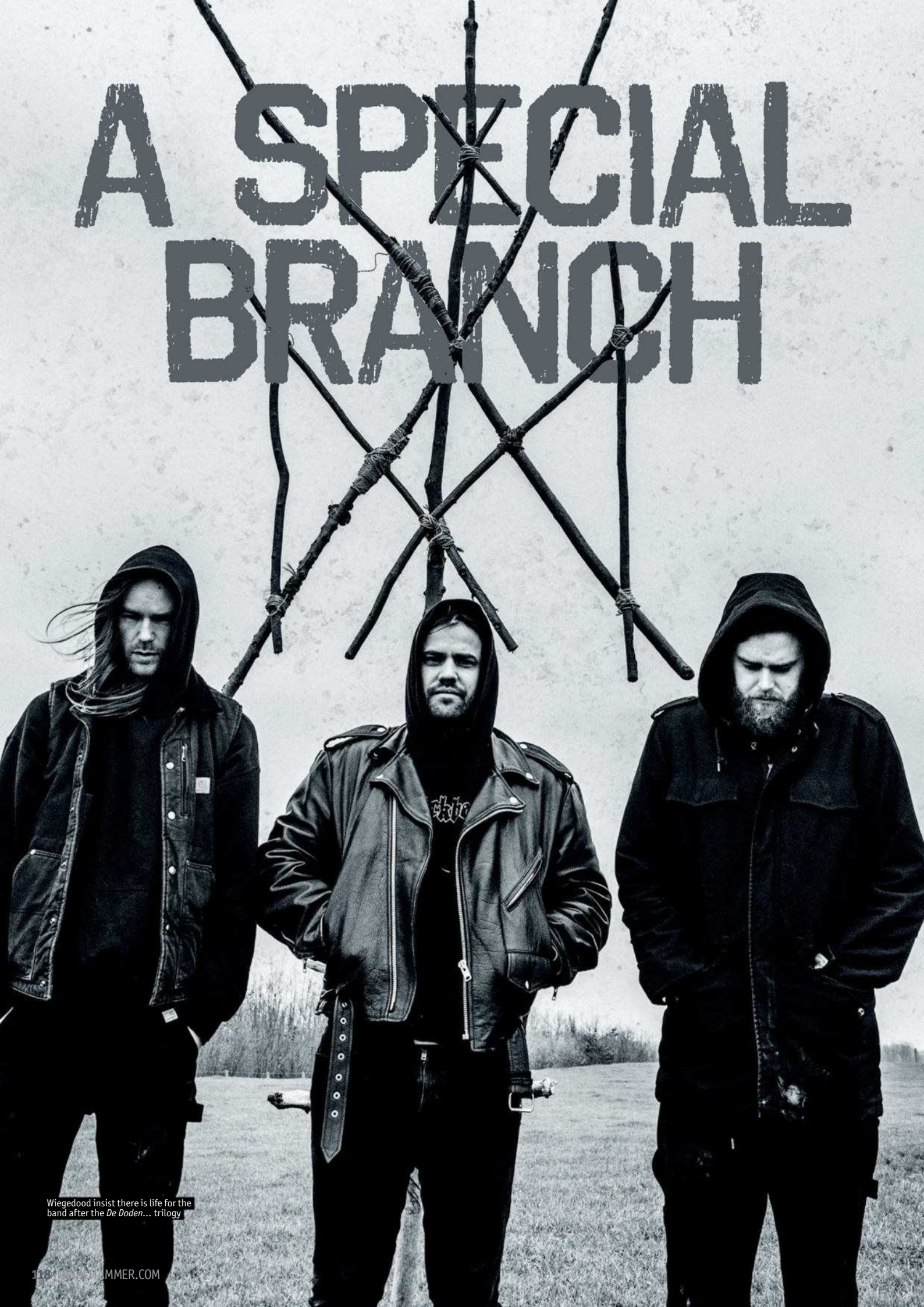


Wiegedood insist there is life for the band after the *De Doden*... trilogy

WIEGEDOOD

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

Fast becoming one of the most talked about bands in the black metal scene, Church Of Ra members Wiegedood are seeking a route out of the dark

WORDS: CHRISTINA WENIG

When Wiegedood released their debut album, *De Doden Hebben Het Goed* ('The Dead Have It Good'), in 2015, they were the first black metal band to emerge out of the Belgian Church Of Ra collective that surrounds underground powerhouse Amenra. Their music was a feral, bleak and dark assault on all senses, and an ambitious one, too. The three-piece didn't just release one full-length but set out to create a trilogy of albums consisting of four songs each, all of them connected under the rule of death and desperation. *De Doden Hebben Het Goed III*, Wiegedood's latest release and final chapter of the album series, sees things come full circle for the band who have grown more and more certain of what they want to be and sound like in the last couple of years.

"*De Doden Hebben Het Goed* was our first attempt at writing a black metal record and by the second and third one, you can hear that we're getting more comfortable with what we're trying to do, or at least I can feel that," guitarist and singer Levy Seynaeve explains. While the members – Levy, guitarist Gilles Demolder and Drummer Wim Coppers – gained a lot of experience in hardcore- and post-metal-based bands like Rise & Fall, Oathbreaker and Amenra, writing their trilogy was a learning process, a study on how to build up songs for over 10 minutes using blastbeats, ferocious screams and fast, repetitive riffs.

"The third part progresses further than the first and second one did. It is even faster again because we're all getting more technically accustomed to the way we play black metal," Levy states. "It's a more extreme album. The aggressive parts are even more aggressive than on the second album but there are also very repetitive parts in which we try to influence the mood of the listener, where there's more a factor of emotion and atmosphere involved."

Connecting a modern sound with a pretty old-school attitude, Wiegedood are not interested in creating an artificial image of themselves or making their music a theatrical act. They refuse to give in to the ways of polishing and staging something to cover up the fact that the essence might be deficient. Instead, they give you just this essence, unfiltered and unadorned. This is already made clear through their choice of instrumentation: The band only use two guitars, drums and vocals to guide you through the *De Doden Hebben Het Goed* series – a total of more than 100 minutes of raw and vicious sound.

"I think a keyboarder or bass player is not gonna make us a better band," Levy explains of this self-imposed limitation. "It's about pushing each instrument and giving everything a certain place at the right moment. If you have an unlimited means of instrumentation, it's easy to make it very theatrical and just blend everything together, so it all sounds quite nice but nothing stands out or has any true purpose. With many instruments, it often becomes one big blob."

Instead of taking the comfortable way, the Belgians choose the challenging one, the one that sees them face their limits and overcome them. Levy Seynaeve himself might be the one bandmember most affected by this act of self-challenging in order to grow and exceed his limits. The musician has played guitar in the extreme metal outfit Hessian before and took over bass duties in Amenra in 2012, but working with Wiegedood was actually his first experience of also being a singer. Looking at the intense nature of the band, it's not an easy task. "Every record is a bit of a challenge for everybody in the band because we always try to push ourselves to make things faster and more technical, we always want to push our own boundaries," he states. "Just like for the first and the second album, I have no idea at the moment how I'm gonna play the guitar parts and sing at the same time live but I guess after a few rehearsals it will get better."

"WE ALWAYS WANT TO PUSH OUR OWN BOUNDARIES"

LEVY SEYNAEVE SEEKS A NEW FRONTIER

Wiegedood was not only born out of the wish to reach sonic and stylistic extremes. For the singer, who was initially drawn into the world of black metal by atmospheric bands like Wolves In The Throne Room as well as the depressive Frenchmen Celestia and Mortifera, there was also the need and urge to create something that was his own, something to put his personal thoughts and feelings into. The result of his lyrical self-exploration is depressive and pessimistic. There is no resolution, no catharsis, no light to the darkness.

"It's good to reflect on yourself and what you're doing sometimes but I tend to be a bit too dramatic about myself. If I write about what I think and feel, it's a bit self-loathing sometimes which is very unnecessary and impractical. The first two albums were very self-reflective and useless to myself," Levy says looking back. "Maybe to other people they have some meaning and use to process certain things, but for me, it never really helped process anything. On the contrary, it made me stand still. On the third one there's a small change in that there's some kind of will to progress instead of trying to stay in the dark, in a place you don't want to be."

The three-piece moved from the independent scene label Consouling Sounds to Century Media at the top of their momentum, letting only one year pass between the release of their sophomore album and *De Doden Hebben Het Goed III*. They have always worked fast, writing all of their three albums – which ideally should be listened to in a row – within only a few band rehearsals. With Levy being a full-time member of the relentlessly touring Amenra and Gilles Demolder and Wim Coppers being busy with Oathbreaker, this project has always taken a huge talent for organisation as well as a tireless work ethos and passion. But the priorities might have shifted a bit.

"Now with the third album we're gonna go all out, definitely. I don't think there was a year when we have played as many shows as we have planned already this year, and there's still a lot being booked and a lot being discussed," the singer predicts. "The third record is going to be the high point of how hard we've been working on Wiegedood. But it's not like at first it was just something we were doing on the side. It has always been a real band to me and something I saw progressing and going somewhere."

With the trilogy reaching its grand finale, 2018 might also be a time to realign the course the band adopted four years ago, a moment to pause, reflect and think about where to go from the *De Doden Hebben Het Goed* realm. And the last years have shown that it probably won't take too long before the Belgians unleash a new beast on the world. "The series is definitely gonna end with the third record that's coming out; we are not gonna add a fourth part to a trilogy, of course," Levy Seynaeve says, laughing.

"But it doesn't mean the end of the band and what we're trying to do. We still have a few records in us." ✠

***DE DODEN HEBBEN HET GOED III* IS OUT NOW VIA CENTURY MEDIA**

Grave Lines: fear and self-loathing

DOOM WITH A CROON!

GRAVE LINES

UK's doom crew put their negativity into perspective

WORDS: KEZ WHELAN

With Grave Lines drawing members from Dead Existence, Throne, Sea Bastard, Dysteria, Landskap and War Wolf, there was never any doubt that they'd create something special together. But not even 2016's hefty debut, *Welcome To Nothing*, could prepare anyone for the unfettered creativity and palpable darkness of their new record, *Fed Into The Nihilist Engine*. The album's hour-long running time flows seamlessly from towering mounds of primal sludge riffage to stark, arrestingly beautiful neo-folk, with vocalist Jake Harding alternating between a throaty, paint-stripping roar and a deep, dusky croon that will sound familiar to fans of his blues project, The Death Letter (think Dead Can Dance's Brendan Perry after a long night fuelled by whiskey and heartbreak).

"From early on, when we were all discussing it as a new project, we had all talked about dynamics and having those stripped back moments and I think everyone liked the idea of keeping it open enough to see where that went," says Jake. "Personally, I was quite keen to allow room to play around vocally a bit more than I had on previous projects and use the different aspects of my voice."

As the band's musical palette expanded, that gave Jake a chance to dig even deeper into the themes of depression that ran through the debut, allowing him to illuminate this darkness from a whole new angle.

"Where my lyrics have often previously delved into negative emotions and ideas and those darker places that our minds go," he explains, "*Fed Into The Nihilist Engine* kind of steps back a bit and looks at how we interact with those thoughts and feelings, that aspect of us that always tries to pull us under. I find it an interesting thing the way many of us have this symbiotic relationship with negativity. There is a seductive nature to self-loathing and hatred and that whole side of our emotions. Personally it's something I always feel drawn to and I see the same thing in many people around me. Getting in that headspace can protect you or shield you from things in a weird way but it also eats away at you. I have always been interested in that. Why are we so easily drawn to such destructive emotions? The Nihilist Engine as a concept is a symbol of that thought process, an ominous machine that poisons us and feeds on us as it draws us in."

> "There is a seductive nature to self-loathing"
> **JAKE HARDING**

Having already road-tested these songs on a recent tour with Black Moth ("Bringing it all to the live setting always feels like the final step in locking everything in place," Jake smiles), Grave Lines are itching to get back out there and see where this dark path takes them.

"The last two years have just seen us hone in a little bit on what we are doing, which, in a roundabout way, creates more room to push things in different directions. We are slowly learning what Grave Lines is and that means we know a bit better what we can do with it." ✠

LINE-UP: Jake Harding (vocals), Oliver Hill (guitar), Staggerin' Matt (bass), Julia Owen (drums, vocals)
HOMETOWN: London/Brighton
SOUNDS LIKE: Gloomy, gothic doom that scrapes the darkest recesses of the human condition.
FOR FANS OF: Neurosis, Unearthly Trance, King Dude
CURRENT RELEASE: *Fed Into The Nihilist Machine* (New Heavy Sounds, 2018)
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/gravelinesband

Blackwater Holylight: perfect imperfection

SOARING PSYCH-FOLK SUMMONINGS!

BLACKWATER HOLYLIGHT

Psychedelic Portlandians find beauty in the gloom

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

With guitars that twang with menace, eerie synths and several thick layers of soupy reverb, Blackwater Holylight's eponymous debut album feels like an invitation to be submerged in some wickedly lysergic sonic swamp. Led by vocalist/bassist Allison 'Sunny' Faris, the all-female Portland, Oregon quartet have lots of that magical individuality that sets the greatest bands apart.

"I wanted to make music with women and create a space where mistakes and feeling vulnerable are acceptable," Allison explains. "The band is a platform to experiment with what we're curious about and what feels intriguing. It's heavy, layered, fuzzy, ambient, poppy, sad, happy, psychedelic and everything in between. We sound like *us*."

Touching upon everything from groove-driven fuzz-rock and glowering post-punk to sweeping, dust-blasted Americana, Blackwater Holylight seem to be a psychedelic band by instinct rather than design, as they harness the downbeat atmosphere that surrounds them in one of America's most meteorologically challenged enclaves. Life in Portland is weird *and* heavy, it seems.

"There is an undeniable inspiration from our climate living in the Pacific Northwest," Allison admits. "It is cold, dark and gloomy a lot of the time and it definitely becomes a part of my mind state. Living in the rain and cold *is* creepy and it *is* mysterious. But it's also incredibly beautiful and comforting, especially when you have an outlet like this to feed your darkness, loneliness and honesty into. It's a 'Be here, *now*' kind of vibe."

It's obvious that Blackwater Holylight are only just beginning to explore the depths of their collective darkness, but if their first record is any indication, something truly special this way comes.

"I'm working as hard as I can to see how far we can go and every day brings something special that I can look at and be proud of," Allison concludes. "I want to grow as much as we can, as a unit and individually, and to feel good about being imperfect. And I think our music will evolve as we do." ✠

LINE-UP: Allison 'Sunny' Faris (bass/vocals), Laura Hopkins (guitar/vocals), Cat Hoch (drums), Sarah McKenna (keyboards)
HOMETOWN: Portland, Oregon
SOUNDS LIKE: Skewed alt-rock with voodoo dreams.
FOR FANS OF: Ides Of Gemini, Om, Sonic Youth
CURRENT RELEASE: *Blackwater Holylight* (Riding Easy, 2018)
WEBSITE: blackwaterholylight.bandcamp.com

Chrch: road trippers

AVANT DOOM-SLUDGE SPIRITUALS!

CHRCH

West Coast mystics take the high and the low road

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER

Aside from being a more pleasing two-word combination than 'cellar door', the 'yoga doom' tag that got attached to bands like Yob, Pilgrim and the now-defunct Salomé sounded like a hipster whistle, but it did point towards the notion that agonisingly/ecstatically slow, downtuned riffs could be both sacred and deeply physical – an act of unblocking internal channels. For Sacramento's Chrch, that idea has a potent resonance. The three lengthy yet minimalist tracks that comprise their second album, *Light Will Consume Us*, are carrier signals for a harrowing, transformative rite, frontwoman Eva's vocals ranging from eerie incantation to bristling, enervated retch, as if crawling towards some fabled realm of redemption.

Infinite, Portals, Aether – all three track titles hint at something beyond the tangible, or agents for a change of state, and that sense of transformation lies at Chrch's core. "I think music is a great vehicle for accessing the states of consciousness that are beyond reason," says guitarist Karl. But it's easy to get too serious. I like having the substance along without losing the fun and natural enjoyment.

"I've been a lifelong explorer of that which is unseen," reveals Eva. "For me, the songs are mirroring and telling, at once, a highly personal story of my own spiritual development, and what I believe to be a universal human story of the evolution of consciousness."

As much as *Light…* feels like a pilgrimage, for Chrch, it's not the destination that matters, but the journey as a dynamic in its own right, one that allows us to come to terms with the dualities within ourselves. "My intention for this album is for it to be a bridge between the basest of our instinctual natures and the highest of our potentials," says Eva. "People often think of difficult experiences as negative while grasping for the 'good times'. All is part of our human condition, and should be celebrated. That said, the celebration sometimes looks like complete destruction, but the human wants experience." ✠

LINE-UP: Eva (vocals), Chris (guitar), Karl (guitar), Ben (bass), Adam (drums)
HOMETOWN: Sacramento, California
SOUNDS LIKE: A soul-trawling doom/sludge voyage through the various neighbourhoods of purgatory.
FOR FANS OF: Monarch!, Subrosa, Pallbearer
CURRENT RELEASE: *Light Will Consume Us All* (Neurot Recordings, 2018)
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/chrchdoomca

Ivar and Einar: folk heroes

Ivar Bjørnson & Einar Selvik

Hugsjá

BY NORSE MUSIC

Nordic visionaries find new worlds to explore

POOLING THEIR EXPANSIVE visions once again, Wardruna's Einar Selvik and Enslaved's Ivar Bjørnson return with another evocative journey back into the mists of Norwegian history. Their 2014 collaboration, *Skuggsjá*, was commissioned to mark the 200th anniversary of Norway's constitution and it enjoyed international acclaim for its distillation of ancient Norse music and modern instrumentation. *Hugsjá* was commissioned by the Bergen International Festival around a theme of migration, and the creative vanguards approached the project with an apt freedom to explore whatever sonic sirens beckoned them – an advantage which they have masterfully exploited. With the mournful thrum of a lyre, the titular opener unfolds into a work of staggering emotional depth, with sparse primal rhythms and droney atmospherics building around soaring vocal harmonies.

This is an album of profound dichotomy; fragile melodies give way to breathtaking crescendos and passages of profound sadness cede to fleeting moments of innate joy. Traditional Norwegian folk music was once the central method of passing stories and traditions through the ages, with each generation augmenting the music with new sounds, stories and

ideas. As nomadic people, these songs absorbed elements of the cultures they encountered, both within and outside of Scandinavia. Likewise, with each track, *Hugsjá* draws in new tones, instruments and melodies, investing each song with a unique resonance. The dramatic closer, *Um Heilage Fjell*, spins spectral harmonies over velvety acoustic texturing, ending with a sombre a cappella chant followed by a taut silence – a potent culmination to this highly spiritualised experience. Utterly arresting, *Hugsjá* is a masterpiece.

9

FOR FANS OF: Myrkur, Sólstafir, Tenhi

JOE DALY

Adzalaan

Into Vermillion Mirrors

VRASUBATLAT/INVICTUS

Solo, ceremonial black metal that ramps up the warp factor

Portland-based multi-instrumentalist R, a driving force behind Ash Borer and Triumvir Foul, has created a self-contained extreme universe of his own with his label, Vrasubatlat. Founded in 2015, Vrasubatlat currently houses six active bands featuring R, all of which either play black metal, death metal or a hybrid of both. Adzalaan is billed as R's one-man BM project, and this debut gets off to an underwhelming start with *Haven To Flesh*, an introductory piece built upon a wavering Burzum-styled riff paired with ceremonial, tom-heavy drums, and a grating layer of guitar noise. Thankfully, however, *...Mirrors* improves as it progresses across its tight run-time of 27 minutes, as R's songwriting reaches near-Leviathan levels of warped ingenuity by the time *Wretched Oaths...* seesaws sickeningly towards the throttling and portentous pairing of *Paralysis Euphoria* and *Vermillion In Absentia*.

6

FOR FANS OF: Triumvir Foul, Teitanblood, Antaeus

DEAN BROWN

Antlers

Beneath.Below.Behold

TOTENMUSIK/VÁN

Strange sonic shadows from Leipzig's horniest

Antlers' decision to begin their second album with no fewer than three eerie, instrumental pieces at least suggests a willingness to fuck with the so-called 'atmospheric black metal' formula. In truth, *Beneath.Below.Behold* does not return to its initial ambient drift: as the hissing, reverb-sodden slither of *Lug's Waters* fades and *Heal* explodes into life, this German quartet are off the leash and spitting bloody teeth, all nods to shoegaze banished to the depths. *Off With Their Tongues* and *Beyond The Golden Light* are both vicious, flailing roars of extremity, a faint Drudkh-esque haze adding an air of otherworldliness to some balls-out, heads-down blasting. Weirdly, the 11-minute *Theom* is even more relentless as melancholy seeps out through hairline cracks in the guitars' grandiose façade. Concluding with two more frosty epics, this is a laudably distinctive addition to black metal's roll of honour.

7

FOR FANS OF: Winterfylleth, Drudkh, Altar Of Plagues

DOM LAWSON

Blackwater Holylight

Blackwater Holylight

RIDING EASY

Oregon psych-rockers tap into rich new frequencies

Portland quartet Blackwater Holylight´s debut album is a thoroughly enchanting work of beautifully dreamy psych, moody late-80s grunge and shoegazey introspection. The band's fragile melodic passages evoke the airy atmospherics of Sonic Youth's more delicate moments of drifting post-punk chime, while the uptempo, garagey fuzz of *The Brian Jonestown Massacre* maintains a harder, druggy edge. The gently obscured vocals of bassist Allison Farris quietly narrate over the proceedings, allowing the sonically sublime stoned tones to wash over with hypnotic resonance, fully immersing the listener in the most satisfying lysergic guitar tones and spacey keyboard ruminations heard in many moons. This is a perfect concoction of ethereal chime and overdriven Sabbathy swell, creating a darker, headier groove. A powerful debut of trance-inducing allure.

8

FOR FANS OF: Bardo Pond, Black Sabbath, Sonic Youth

LIAM YATES

Blutvial
Mysteries Of Earth
HEIDENS HART

British black metallers continue down their own, gritty path

Blutvial have been 'quietly' doing their own thing for a decade now, somehow existing apart from the rest of the UK BM scene. *Mysteries Of Earth* is their third full-length and their most vitriolic, the band having lost none of their bite or icy malevolence over the years. Despite a rough and unpolished production, the sound is sizeable and in-your-face, the dense combination of percussive assault and chainsaw guitars threatening to overwhelm the speakers, somewhat recalling Gaahl/King-era Gorgoroth. That said, though the tempos frequently remain high, the vibe is more earthy and organic, with many numbers capturing a much more rocking black'n'roll vibe. An exciting and invigorating listen, this deserves a wider audience, something which may be attributed to a lack of live shows. **7**

FOR FANS OF: **Gorgoroth, Taake, Kvist**

DAYAL PATTERSON

Bong
Thought And Existence
RITUAL PRODUCTIONS

Newcastle's drome-doon psychonauts ring some changes

These doom overlords averaged an album a year until 2015, but recently we've seen about as much Bong action as your friendly neighbourhood straight-edger. *Thought And Existence* is both a return to form and something of a reinvention then, notable for breaking a rare dry spell and being their first studio album not to feature shahi baaja player Ben Freeth. After *The Golden Fields*' portentous intro, any fears that the power trio setup would lessen Bong's staggering wall of sound are put to rest as Mike Vest's layered, reality-rupturing guitar roars into earshot. Bassist Dave Terry's bellowing chant is more present than ever, approaching the closest thing to a hook in their oeuvre during the song's euphoric peak. Meanwhile, *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* finds drummer Mike Smith changing the feel of Dave's amorphous riffery and Mike's lysergic leads with almost militaristic rolls and a pounding pulse. While it reaches the same hypnotic planes as previous opuses, there's an economy and efficiency to this album that may help it resonate beyond seasoned doom fanatics. **7**

FOR FANS OF: **Sleep, Boris, 11Paranoias**

KEZ WHELAN

De Profundis
The Blinding Light Of Faith
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Brit death stalwarts hit the malevolent jackpot

Evolution in death metal is not always viewed in a positive light, but the way that De Profundis have blossomed here is undeniable. Rooted in old-school fury but proudly, purposefully progressive, *The Blinding Light…* is a revelation from beginning to end. The key here is the band's inventive but precise songwriting: with shades of everything from Angelcorpse to Opeth, songs like grandiloquent opener *Obsidian Spires* and the gloriously misanthropic *War Be Upon Him* are full of insidious hooks and moments of pure metal abandon. Even when at their most straightforward, as on the Hypocrisy-esque *Martyrs*, De Profundis are audibly lost in the moment and aiming for greatness. The guitar solos are worth the price of admission alone, the arrangements are inspired and the production strikes the perfect balance between raw violence and polished punch. A British death metal milestone. **8**

FOR FANS OF: **Akercocke, Hypocrisy, Novembers Doom**

DOM LAWSON

Et Moriemur
Epigrammata
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Medieval-minded doom from multi-instrumental Czechs

Doom metal is often more powerful when it's simple and unadorned; overload it with bells and whistles and you risk over-egging the doom pudding. These medieval-obsessed Prague eccentrics pooh-pooh this dictum, decorating their death/doom with a gamut of Gregorian chants, trombones, spooky pianos, synths and violins, occasionally sounding like they're drowning out a funeral doom rehearsal with a New Age relaxation tape. And yet, somehow, Czech bands have made a virtue of this flamboyant kitchen-sink approach (see also: experimental black metal pioneers Master's Hammer). The whispery spoken-word is maybe a po-faced goth cliché too far, and the keyboard sounds cheap and dated, but they're overshadowed by sinister chords that billow and heave like moonlit ghost ships, and the hypnotic juxtaposition with the Gregorian choir is a very persuasive USP. **7**

FOR FANS OF: **My Dying Bride, Skepticism, Gregorian**

CHRIS CHANTLER

Aura Noir: unhinged and in your face

Aura Noir
Aura Noire
INDIE RECORDINGS

Black/thrash reprobates reveal a sophisticated streak

CONSIDERING THIS UNHOLY thrashing wolf pack's lengthy and tumultuous history – one that spans 25 years, includes a variety of Norse metal celebrities and near-death experiences – it's only fitting Aura Noir still sound like the musical equivalent of falling down a flight of stairs while decrying any musical progression made since 1984. Six albums in and guitarist Rune 'Blasphemer' Eriksen proudly adopts the tone from Voivod's *War And Pain* and Ole 'Apollyon' Moe apparently hasn't properly tuned his drums since then either. However, for this type of troglodyte thrash, the primitive production creates a precarious and effective atmosphere so in-your-face it's chiselling away at your fillings. This unhinged nature may highlight the band's raw, knuckle-dragging side, but also works detrimentally by obscuring the innovative axework of *Mordant Wind* and *Cold Bone Grasp*. Aura Noir themselves seem happy to revel in this dichotomy. Album opener *Dark Lung Of The Storm* is loaded with the riffology and arrangements thrash metal's modern whippersnapper wave have been trying to write since the early 00s. On the other hand, *Outro* is one of the dumbest-sounding pieces of music in metal history. What *Aura Noire* does is hide Munch paintings behind cave wall scratchings. **7**

FOR FANS OF: **Gehennah, Deströyer 666, early Sodom**

CONNIE GORDON

Original Sins *A CLASSIC ALBUM FROM THE DARKEST VAULT*

Clock DVA White Souls In Black Suits
INDUSTRIAL RECORDS *1980*

Emerging from that febrile post-punk period of wild creativity, Sheffield's Clock DVA were contemporaries of Cabaret Voltaire and Heaven 17 and signed to Throbbing Gristle's Industrial imprint. Their (at the time) cassette-only debut remains one of the most daring records of the era. A mind-warping collage of punk-funk grooves, formless cacophony and wonky tape-loop perversity, its riotous disregard for convention and harnessing of hostile noise would eventually seep into the freewheeling ethos of the burgeoning industrial movement, inspiring the likes of SPK and Test Department and, by extension, Ministry and Skinny Puppy. Nearly 40 years on, it still sounds like sanity disintegrating.

The Body: great musicians... but they may bring down the mood at dinner parties

The Body

I Have Fought Against It, But I Can't Any Longer

THRILL JOCKEY

Portland's despondent duo find a new mode of misery to share

IF THERE IS one band in 2018 that defines what it means to make 'heavy' music, then that band is Portland-based duo The Body. Over the course of their near-15-year recording history, the duo of Chip King (guitars, vocals) and Lee Buford (drums, programming) have, at one point or another, accumulated everything that could conceivably, sonically, be called 'heavy', thrown it into a nihilistic spectrograph, and harnessed the resulting frequencies into a canon that ranges from mono-riff, caveman bludgeons to maudlin, choral accompanied flights of deafening ennui; from punishing, chopped-and-screwed techno barbs to the most horrifically despondent pop album you've ever heard. For *I Have Fought...* (the title itself is taken from Virginia Woolf's suicide note), their seventh full-length, however, the duo have taken their approach to songcraft to hitherto unexplored extremes – creating as they have entirely new songs composed of samples culled from their previous output – and crafted their finest, and certainly most deeply, uncomfortably bleak record to date. As they say themselves: "We're not angry, we're just really sad." And it shows. The opening procession of tracks, from the morose strings-and-static of *The Last Form Of Loving* to the tribal synth pummel of *Partly Alive* will sound familiar to those who picked up their collaborations with Full Of Hell, but it's during *The West Has Failed* where things get weird; it's a distorted, trip-hop banger, complete with vocal samples of dub-reggae MC Eek-A-Mouse! From there their warped cavalcade veers into mental-health ruining, torn-up percussive batterings – *An Urn* – and gnawing, noise-washed accompaniments to brilliant, and genuinely upsetting, spoken word stories of the unbearable pain of existence – closer *Ten Times A Day, Every Day, A Stranger*.

8

FOR FANS OF: Scorn, Throbbing Gristle, Godflesh

TOBY COOK

Ghastly

Death Velour

20 BUCK SPIN

Swedish ghouls rewire the death metal template

Relative newcomers Ghastly play a complex, hallucinatory death metal that transcends genre boundaries in favour of windingly progressive experimentation, similar to the defunct Morbus Chron. Bearing the trademark melodic groove of Ghastly's Finnish forefathers Demilich, Adramelech and Purtenance, *Death Velour* also conjures up the eccentric and quirky wanderings of Darkthrone's *Soulside Journey*, making Ghastly's obscure brand of brutality the DM equivalent of a psychological thriller as opposed to gruesome horror film splatter. Sonically the band share similar spectral atmospherics to Swedish vampire mystics Tribulation while still maintaining a violent, snarling attack, and it's refreshing to hear such moody auras combined with progressive experimentation without becoming a showcase in tiresome technical DM clamour. *Death Velour* should inaugurate Ghastly alongside Phreneleth and Vastum and the current crop of newer bands offering a fresh perspective on the genre.

7

FOR FANS OF: Morbus Chron, Execration, Tribulation

LIAM YATES

Glorior Belli

The Apostates

SEASON OF MIST

Convention-bucking black metallers take more unexpected turns

Loud and proud square pegs in a round hole, Glorior Belli have created some of the most distinctive black metal-minded music around since first emerging from the French underground in 2002. Their latest, gods-bothering sonic manifesto, *The Apostates*, sees them spread their leathery wings further still in a bid to once again redefine themselves, and contains some of the most exciting and surprising songs they've yet created. Adding to their infamous fusion of black and groove-based Southern metal, the genre-bucking band flirt with grunge (*Hangin' Crepe* has some haunting Alice In Chains-esque harmonies) and death (*Sui Generis*) to keep things fresh. The record's biggest talking point is final track *Rebel Reveries*, though. Driven by a massive, stadium-shaking chorus that calls to mind Thirty Seconds To Mars (yes, really), it's destined to delight and perhaps divide fans in equal measure.

7

FOR FANS OF: Crowbar, Watain, Kvelertek

EDWIN McFEE

King Goat

Debt Of Aeons

AURAL MUSIC

British doom crew find their own spot on the edifice

Ever since the ominous sound of rain and tolling church bells combined with the devil's tritone, doom has persisted as metal's most dependable subgenre. Granted, there are occasional variations on the theme that mix in sludge, stoner, death or drone influences, but overall, the template that Black Sabbath created is still remarkably intact, Pallbearer's recent efforts notwithstanding. While Brighton quintet King Goat don't seek to reinvent that tried-and-true wheel, they give it an intriguing spin on their sophomore album, *Debt Of Aeons*, which compellingly combines elements of Ghost's Blue Öyster Cult worship, Candlemass's epic doom and even some traces of Opeth's recent prog rock. Singer Trim's vibrato-drenched vocals might be a bit much for some ears, and the deliberate dirges don't always justify their lengths, but the ambition of songs like *Rapture* and the title track is palpable and commendable. A worthy addition to doom's mighty canon.

7

FOR FANS OF: Candlemass, Black Sabbath, Procol Harum

CLAY MARSHALL

SMALL MERCIES

SHORT BLASTS

Above Aura

Path To Ruin

PAGAN

Taking some of Deathspell Omega's opulent, writhing guitar tones, but to slightly more linear affect, this EP journeys through vast dank caverns, switching between commandingly mid-paced chants and gravity-well whorls, all with impressively unyielding conviction. **[7]**

JONATHAN SELZER

Black Mass Pervertor

Life Beyond The Walls Of Flesh

BLOOD HARVEST

Finnish BM's unique vibe is alive and rotting proudly away on this blistering seven-track hymn to Hell's housemaster. Ugly, primitive and fizzing with hostility,these abrupt tirades will make hate great again. **[8]**

DOM LAWSON

Godthrymm

A Grand Reclamation

TRANSCENDING

Featuring members/ ex-members of My Dying Bride, Vallenfyre and Solstice, this debut EP offers epic and dynamic doom metal of a fairly melodic and old-school nature. Not overly original but a work of some promise. **[6]**

DAYAL PATTERSON

Messa

Feast For Water

AURAL MUSIC

Elegant-sounding Italians enrich the doom metal template

Messa's brand of haunting 'Scarlet doom' steps away from the repetitive stoned Sabbath drone formula for a more subtle 70s jazz-infused conjuration of Rhodes piano, ambient atmospherics and progressive heavy fuzz. Helmed by the powerfully sultry tones of vocalist Sara, *Feast For Water*'s cryptic lyrics focus on the symbolic and ritual features of the liquid element, creating a more mystical elegance. While the band's backbone of heavy 70s fuzz offers a swaggeringly spellbinding groove, the complex bluesy lead guitar, diverse percussion and moody delicate jazz flourishes make the 'doom' tag the band associates with somewhat misleading and downplays their more unique qualities as something far more dynamic and alluring. More mature and engaging than the band's dirgy previous work, Messa have become one of the more interesting bands to have evolved from the doom metal template.

7

FOR FANS OF: Jex Thoth, The Devil's Blood, Windhand

LIAM YATES

Rotten Sound

Suffer To Abuse

SEASON OF MIST

Finnish blastbeat fanatics keep grindcore sounding fresh

If you're still hungry for more after this quartet's last full-length, 2016's *Abuse To Suffer*, then this similarly monikered EP is a perfect after-dinner snack. While the title suggests more of the same, *Suffer To Abuse* has a rawer guitar tone and an ever-so-slightly more adventurous feel. Don't worry, this is Rotten Sound after all, so songs like the astonishingly harsh *Slaves Of Lust* still demonstrate their uncanny knack for crafting straightforward, exquisitely brutal grindcore, but elsewhere their trademark sound is seasoned with ominous Swedish death metal atmospheres (*Stressed Mess*), thick, syrupy grooves (*Nutrition*) and the occasional stuttering, noise rock-esque riff (*The Misfit*). It won't win over the unconverted, but *Suffer To Abuse* is focused enough to elevate it beyond a standard stopgap EP and make it a memorable part of the band's discography in its own right.

7

FOR FANS OF: Nasum, Napalm Death, Gadget

KEZ WHELAN

Solstice

White Horse Hill

INVICTUS PRODUCTIONS

Yorkshire's true doom veterans make a majestic full return

Twenty years have passed since these redoubtable Yorkshiremen last graced us with a long-player, the towering classic *New Dark Age*. Several years of inactivity were followed by an exhaustive flurry of archive releases, an exciting new EP finally appearing in 2014. Solstice here pick up where they left off, still honing their blend of arcane, thunderous, battle-scarred epic metal, wrought-iron doom majesty and rustic pagan folk textures. Guitarist and band mastermind Rich Walker has wisely retained the services of resolute tubthumper Rick Budby, while singer Paul Kearns bursts with an emotive conviction that wasn't quite there with previous, more melodramatic Solstice vocalists, the Irishman's muscular baritone ringing with clarity and passion on lyrics seemingly ripped from the yellowing pages of English folklore. It's a perfect fit for these sublime melodies and rugged riffs as they brood and gallop across damp, misty moorland.

8

FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, Candlemass, Pagan Altar

CHRIS CHANTLER

Summon

Paravz Il Zilittv

IRON BONEHEAD

Portuguese death metallers carve their own abyssal alcove

Abyssal death metal, where Incantation's downtuned riffing meets Portal's angular, 'out of this world' approach, has almost become a subgenre itself. Initially, Summon seem to tick all the right boxes with their hooded anonymous members, growls from beyond drenched in so much echo there's barely any human element left and slow, murky staccato riffing. But this Portuguese trio are a bit late to the party; Grave Miasma, Temple Nightside Father Befouled and more have swept the plate clean. At least Summon acknowledge that when walking these dark corridors, you have to shed new light on the unnamed abominations in the shadows. Hence their near-industrial guitar sound and subsequent mechanical vibe, transfigured by shades of ritualistic music and outbursts of primal violence. Cavernous yes, but with a (small) difference and destined to greater things.

6

FOR FANS OF: Incantation, Grave Miasma, Portal

OLIVIER BADIN

My Favourite Artwork

CHRIS REIFERT
Violation Wound

IRON MAIDEN
Number Of The Beast

"When I was just discovering metal, this cover blew me away. Imagine being 13 and seeing that for the first time when heavy metal was still new, knowing almost nothing about the band. Album covers are a crucial part of any good album and Maiden had the best!"

Frightened? Well, we're definitely clenching...

Voices

Frightened

CANDLELIGHT/SPINEFARM

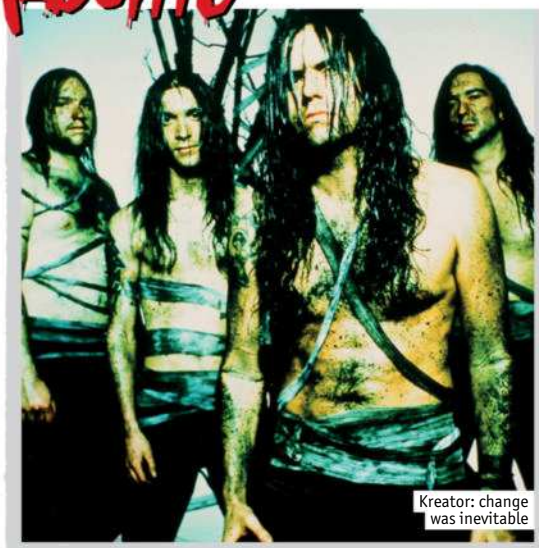
Akercocke-aligned renegades take a thrilling left turn

NOW THREE RECORDS deep, Voices are cultivating a discography to rival and arguably transcend that of their founding members, drummer David Gray and guitarist Sam Loynes' original outfit, Akercocke – the band whose sexualised Satanism delivered with a svelte hammerblow saw their 2011 break-up and recent reformation receive dismay and joy in equal amounts. Not that their fluctuating status deterred David and Sam, who in moving forward with Voices retained their knack for exultant extremity while widening their subject matter, ditching Satan for a wider exploration of human suffering, inspired by cinema and delivered with silver-screen scope. *Frightened* expands further still, moving away from the punishing urbanity of 2016 concept album *London* into more mellifluous, yet at times no less intimidating pastures. A more pensive affair from the off, *Unknown* acts as a herald for forthcoming sonic departures, exploring melancholically progressive territories, Peter Benjamin's chilling melodic vocal offset by anguished howls as the track teeters on the brink of chaos, eventually taking full advantage of David's extreme percussive abilities. *Evaporated* exemplifies their knack for punishment fearlessly combined with hooks and melodies that wouldn't sound odd on a Police record. Influences from prog aeons past continue, tumble-down fills straight out of the Neil Peart playbook punctuating the black metal-meets-Bauhaus of *Dead Feelings* and the sorrowful yet brazen stomp of *Funeral Day*. *Sequences* further explores post-punk leanings, a caustic rifforama leading into the heart-rending strings of *Footsteps*. For those who found *London* to be an exemplary modern progression upon their blackened death metal template, *Frightened* may be a step too far, but it's a bold and accomplished broadening of Voices' horizons that retains much of their intricate extremity within an expanded emotional and sonic framework. Another modern progressive masterpiece to add to their repertoire.

8

FOR FANS OF: Akercocke, Ulver, Arcturus

TOM O'BOYLE



Kreator: change was inevitable

Resurrections

Unearthing the latest extreme reissues

WHEN THE HARSHEST decade for thrash metal – AKA the dreaded 90s – began, **KREATOR**, like many others, were at a crossroads and though it remains their last proper 'thrash' classic, *Coma Of Souls* **[7]** was also an artistic dead end. Changes *had* to happen and they did two years later. With *Renewal* **[8]** – part of a series of four deluxe reissues from the Noise Records catalogue, complete with plenty of bonus tracks – the band took a leap of faith by throwing industrial and hardcore influences into the mix while venturing away from the primitive, 'slash and kill' approach of their early works. Even if the album undertook some questionable experiments and its initially shabby production (something that's been slightly reversed thanks to a new, more fitting mastering) were met with suspicion at the time, it now deserves to be rediscovered. Produced by *Burn My Eyes* sound engineer Vincent Wojno and Kreator's only album recorded without original drummer, Jürgen 'Ventor' Reil, 1995's *Cause For Conflict* **[5]** was a poor attempt to recapture their early savagery, but with a more US-styled stance. 1997's *Outcast* **[6]**, was their first, half-baked attempt at aping the more gothic sound of the last part of the decade, with the help of Tommy Vetterli from Coroner on guitar. It wasn't as accomplished as *Endorama* would be two years later but had a few hidden gems, such as *Phobia*. Long overdue, the reissuing of **PUNGENT STENCH**'s back catalogue is a reminder how the Austrians had a knack for truly disturbing art, their second album, *Been Caught Buttering* **[6]**, with its severed head cut in half and kissing, grabbing the brass ring here. The often-overlooked EP *Dirty Rhymes And Psychotronic Beats* **[8]** and final album before their first split in 1995, *Club Mondo Bizarre – for Members Only* **[7]**, added a solid dose of rock'n'roll and sarcastic humour, where Master meets Nashville Pussy, and remain their career highlights.

OLIVIER BADIN

Thy Catafalque

Geometria

SEASON OF MIST

Hungary's avant-black explorers add some more exhilarating twists

Trying to pin down Thy Catafalque's sound is like trying to prove a theorem with crayons; the Hungarian's style is jazzy at times, black metal at others, trippy and electronic in other moments and hugely rewarding throughout. The movements from each weird and wonderful feature are smooth and the person behind it all, Tamás Kátai, constantly breaks from tradition to bring forth a record that is as thrilling as it is unusual. *Geometria* begins on the curious and jazz-influenced *Hajnali Csilla*, a track that soon segues into gorgeous female vocals before Szamojéd Freskó bursts into life with frenetic guitars and robotic vocals. The dastardly swagger of *Sík* is another sharp turn into leftfield but for Thy Catafalque it's a move that makes perfect sense. In lesser hands such contrasts would fall flat but *Geometria* suffers not for its eclectic rhythms. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Solefald, Dödheimsgard, Arcturus

CHERYL CARTER

Totalselfhatred

Solitude

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Emotionally devastating black metallers find resilience in the wastelands

Anyone who has endured periods of suffocating sadness will identify with Totalselfhatred's misanthropic mandate. Their third album departs seven years hence from the laudably potent, rough-hewn black metal of 2011's *Apocalypse In Your Heart* into increasingly solipsistic, doom-laden environs. *Solitude MMXIII* is a disaffected waltz punctuated by savagery, spending 10 grandiose minutes abjectly aghast at humanity. *Cold Numbness* contorts amidst electronic barbs and elegiac strings, compounded by the corrupted dreamscape of *Black Infinity* – an anti-Alcest. Expressing a yearning for solace amidst nature, *Solitude* articulates the discomfort with the modern world found in much of BM, but far from surrendering to sadness it draws strength from it, epitomised in the title of closing track *Nyktophilia* – a melodically abject void for those who worship darkness. *Solitude* is the sound of Totalselfhatred's maturation process, the finding of comfort within discomfort. **8**

FOR FANS OF: ColdWorld, Make A Change... Kill Yourself, Wedard

TOM O'BOYLE

Violation Wound

With Man In Charge

PEACEVILLE

Autopsy mainman gobs up a punk rock splatterfest

It shouldn't come as a surprise to see Chris Reifert fully embracing his inner punk, here on guitar and vocals. There's always been a healthy dose of dirty streetpunk in Autopsy, and Abscess's earliest recordings gave more than a few Mohawk-topped and gobbing nods. But what's striking about Violation Wound is how productive they've been since they drank their first can of cheap, warm beer in 2013. This, album number four, is probably their most metalised assault yet and with its high position in the mix, the throbbing bass adds that extra late-80s, Anthrax-style vintage vibe. While these 21 nuggets have more in common musically with Minor Threat or TSOL than Napalm Death, Reifert's disgust for his fellow man and tales of misery and debauchery are as sharp and crude as in his day job. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Suicidal Tendencies, Dead Kennedys, TSOL

OLIVIER BADIN

Wiegedood

De Doden Hebben Het Goed III

CENTURY MEDIA

A blistering black metal lament from the Church Of Ra

Given that Wiegedood's members are from forward-thinking, experimental bands Amenra and Oathbreaker, the music they make in this incarnation is starkly traditionalist and intensely focused by comparison. This is coruscating black metal that prioritises groove and intensity. *...III*, unsurprisingly, forms the final part of a trilogy that laments the loss of a friend. *Prowl* is a brazen opener, a predatory groove over schizophrenic percussion. *Doodskalm*'s skittish chaos and shrill exhortations see rapacious speed tussling with piercing licks. The title track, which translates as 'the dead have it good', is a 12-minute, undulating riffscape, ever increasing in ire unto bullish closer *Parool*, all hissing cymbals and shunting, mesmerically ill-tempered riffing. *De Doden Hebben Het Goed III* succeeds as an effective summation of its predecessors: a ceaselessly anguished, punishing listen, that despite its overall lack of sonic variation prevails by sheer force of will. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Misþyrming, Auðn, The Great Old Ones

TOM O'BOYLE

Inspirations From Beyond

SAM LOYNES

Voices/The Antichrist Imperium

Nico

Desertshore

"Desertshore is immensely powerful. Nico's doom-crooning amongst the drones of the piano-organ achieve crushing darkness in vast quantities. Her dramatic approach has permeated my own compositions thereafter. Nico would be 'at one' with todays most crushing metal acts."

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Jo Quail takes a bow

Anna Von Hausswolff

JO QUAIL

THE DOME, LONDON

Anna Von Hausswolff transports us all to another realm

Germany's otherworldly chanteuse takes a trip to the beyond

IF YOUR TASTES run to the more exploratory ends of the underground spectrum, the chances are you're no stranger to **JO QUAIL [8]**. In the past few months alone the British cellist been sought out by the likes of Swans, Myrkur and Amenra to draw audiences across a threshold, but such is the nomadic nature of her music that however many times you see her, you'll never feel as though you're on familiar ground. Tonight more so as the rich, undulating tones she draws out of her instrument – electrified and carved like the skeletal remains of a Martian – are swathed in industrial heartbeats. At once internally resonant, like listening to your bloodstream carrying residues of subconscious memory, and welded to something ageless and fluid, it's an immersive experience that's given added weight by the concentration and physicality with which she plays.

Such is the reverence offered to **ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF [10]** these days that a sold-out venue goes absolutely silent as one the second the house lights dim. One of a small number of contemporary female singers whose natural habitat is some liminal state of consciousness, Anna's music is both that yearned-for 'solemn space' Wardruna's Einar Selvik has spoken about and a premonition, as if it's entering into a realm of the divine. Perched behind an organ like it's the control deck of a spaceship and staring out transfixed, her voice is otherworldly but has sense-shattering presence too, channelling a power that feels disproportionate to its host. The opening *The Truth, The Glow, The Fall* sounds like an aftermath. Ecclesiastical keyboard cadences drift like fallout before getting swept up into a Dead Can Dance-style pilgrim pulse, Anna's vocals shifting from ethereal reverie to rapt incantation. When the keyboard cuts out during the reverberating, ecstatic *Pomperipossa*, the shout of "Fuck!" proves an ultimately good-natured response to an artist ripped from her trance. But there's something so binding about the likes of *Källans Återuppståndelse* – a glazed journey over hallowed ground that echoes David Lynch collaborator Julee Cruise – so humbling and transformative, that it's forgotten in a heartbeat, if you still felt you had one. The band around her all face towards the centre of the stage, drawn in by the magnetic pull as *The Mysterious Vanishing Of Electra* hits a Swans-esque, mantric groove, the vocals a visceral, wracked reality-restructuring chant that feel like a visitation from another dimension. When she walks through the crowd during a closing, potently intimate *Gösta*, it's a compact with a devout audience on a night when you realise wonders really do exist.

JONATHAN SELZER

SETLIST

The Truth, The Glow,
The Fall
The Marble Eye
Pomperipossa
Ugly And Vengeful
Källans Återuppståndelse
The Mysterious Vanishing
Of Electra
Come Wander With Me
Gösta

Savage Master
DUNGEON
THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

London filth merchants **DUNGEON [7]** have been out on the road promoting their delightfully nasty debut and they've honed their chops considerably, thankfully without smoothing out the rough edges that give them their charm. NWOBHM bangs heads with d-beat punk, via some savage German-style thrashing. Clad in what can only be described as a steel bikini and backed by four hangmen, Stacey Savage is a force of heavy metal nature, treating the modest stage like it's Long Beach Arena circa 1984. **SAVAGE MASTER [8]** play American metal with a capital USA. *With Whips And Chains* and *Black Hooves* hark back to the mid-80s glory of Savage Grace, Helstar and Bitch, with a dose of Germanic metal à la Warlock thrown in for good measure. Their storming rendition of Riot's ultimate metal anthem *Swords And Tequila* sets out their stall nicely. Hopefully they'll be back soon, on stages big enough to do them justice.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Venom Inc
SUFFOCATION/ NERVOSA
ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

With two of the heaviest names in metal on the bill, it's a shame the venue is only three-quarters full. Nevertheless, preceding Brazilian trio **NERVOSA [7]** get the crowd moving with catchy thrash riffing, masterful flowing lead guitar parts, pounding drums and cattish vocals. **SUFFOCATION**'s **[9]** non-touring frontman Frank Mullen has left the band, but Disgorge's Ricky Myers, offering an imposing vocal performance and stage presence, is a capable replacement. Their brutal, sonically devastating death metal assault culminates in a crushing rendition of *Infecting The Crypts*, charging up their unassailable reputation. **VENOM INC [8]** – the Cronos-less aspect of the Venom schism – don't disappoint but don't fully live up to their legendary status either. Abaddon is absent, and the band disappoint the dwindling crowd by playing too many non-classic cuts from the Tony 'Demolition Man' Dolan era. Still, everyone is singing along to *Warhead* and *Black Metal*, and Mantas's tapping abilities are suitably mesmerising. The band finish up with a raging encore of *Witching Hour*, bringing a rousing night of metal to a close.

MAGDALENA MEDVED

Demomancy: death metal from the (eye) shadow realm

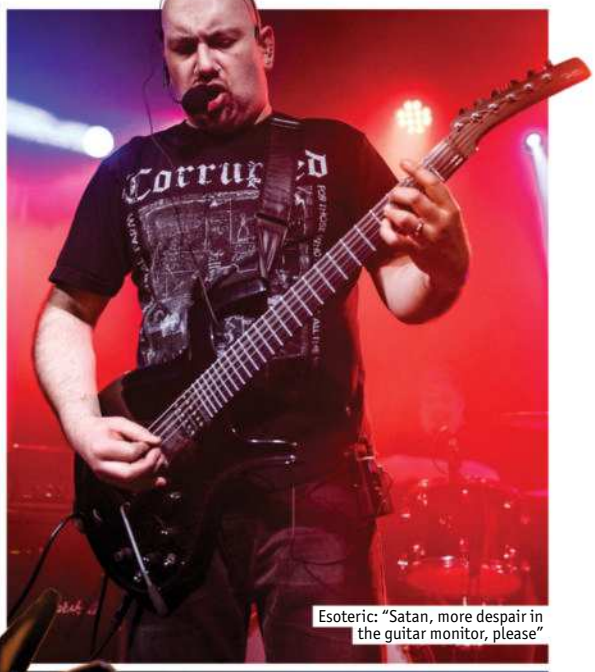
There's nothing ropey about Arkhon Infaustus

Arkhon Infaustus
DEMONOMANCY/ THE INFERNAL SEA
BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON

Gallic filthmongers make a baleful return

A BAND WITH a vigorous habit of drawing you into their own, Great Plague-themed world, **THE INFERNAL SEA [6]** have taken a step up visually by cloaking the band in cowls and beaked Black Death masks. But tonight, particularly in this company, it sets up expectations for a ceremonial offering that their engaging, if fairly linear, BM fails to deliver. Italy's **DEMONOMANCY [7]** are more unleashed, ploughing through reverb-drenched realms with abandon. Stud-adorned and sporting bat-mask, Niflheim-style make-up that only the truly unselfconscious could get away with, this is old-school, primitive DM in the Mystifier mould that churns through your consciousness until it resonates on primal levels beyond the reach of rational thought. What they lack in originality they make up for in conviction, aided by speed metal shrieks as if their velocity is lifting them off the tracks. Recently returned from a seven-year hiatus, and not sounding like the break has granted them any good will, **ARKHON INFAUSTUS [8]** still carry echoes of the sickening, inter-dimensional lurch of Gallic compatriots Blut Aus Nord and Deathspell Omega, but theirs is a more rough-hewn approach, adulterated by outright decadence, fealty to Satan as master of defilement and all-round, misanthropic rejection of any fucks to give. Tonight, they're a chunky cesspool of filth, DK Deviant's face a grimace of distaste as destined riffs writhe and clatter like tentacles dragging a committed crowd down to the depths.

JONATHAN SELZER



Esoteric: "Satan, more despair in the guitar monitor, please"

Bell Witch: a trance encounter

Esoteric
BELL WITCH/MONARCH/ A FOREST OF STARS
BOSTON ARMS, LONDON

Birmingham's doom psychonauts overwhelm the senses

WATCHING A FOREST OF STARS [8] is akin to being a voyeur at a Victorian séance. Their unique sound incorporates driving black metal, neo-classical and avant-garde tropes and sees singer Mr Curse channelling a vaudeville carnival barker on *Gatherer Of The Pure*. Flute and violin swirl around with hypnotic grace while the frontman acts truly possessed. **MONARCH [8]** bring the doom and a different form of mesmerism. Candles, dry ice, ethereal bewitching vocals and dramatic screams from coffee-swilling Emilie 'Eurogirl' Bresson are just one layer of this rite. The other is the dense explosions of flattening instrumental ballast from the other players. Although very much a band of the moment, **BELL WITCH [5]** are definitely musical Marmite. Taking us into *As Above*, the first massive movement of *Mirror Reaper* it's obvious many are completely overpowered by the repetitive, trance-like rhythms from this Seattle duo. For the rest of us, though, it's a tedious paint-drying experience in musical form. A much more dynamic form of doom dementia sees **ESOTERIC [9]** unleashing *Abandonment* and a surprisingly expansive set rather than one of claustrophobic gibbering madness. They also air new, as-yet-untitled material – their first since 2011 – hitting sonic peaks and troughs that are both gracefully regal and utterly compelling; Greg Chandler's soul-shattering screams a dream to some, a nightmare to others. Talk about an overload of the senses.

PETE WOODS

ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF: DEREK BREMNER/ARKHON/ESOTERIC: TINA KORHONEN

THE METAL TEST

Pitting your heroes against the test that really matters

WORDS: ALI COOPER

DAVE WYNDORF

MONSTER MAGNET

Space lord, ant-eating, rib-snapping motherfucker

WHAT'S THE MOST ILLEGAL THING YOU'VE EVER DONE?

"There are a few nurses buried in shallow graves in Connecticut but that wasn't really me. Besides that, I've been arrested for not returning rental cars but that's not very illegal..." ✗

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL ALBUM YOU OWN?

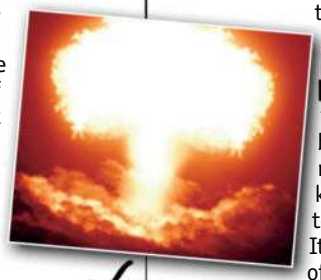
"Black Sabbath, *Vol. 4*. Those kinds of records beat modern metal to me. Everybody's trying to out-macho each other now – it's just a bunch of guys in black clothes in the middle of the woods shouting, 'Boo!'" ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST INJURY YOU'VE EVER HAD?

"I broke a rib jumping into the crowd at a festival. The crowd grabbed my shoulders and security grabbed my feet. They pulled me apart like a wishbone and my rib popped. It was like a cartoon – I remember feeling it stretching against my skin and snapping like a chicken bone." ✓

WHAT'S THE MOST YOU'VE EVER BEEN SICK?

"When I was 18, my first band were playing New York and we went to a big party to schmooze it up because Blondie were there. I was drunk off my ass and couldn't take it so I went out to my bandmate's car and laid on the roof. Debbie Harry came out and saw me and I started puking – it was a never-ending volcano of projectile vomit. The physics don't match up – I didn't eat much so I don't know where it all came from!" ✓



WHAT'S THE GROSSEST THING YOU'VE EVER HAD IN YOUR MOUTH?

"I was eating cereal while drunk and ants had invaded the box so I was chewing on honeycomb cereal laced with living ants. My girlfriend was screaming at me but it took me a while to realise why it tasted funny. I also accidentally brushed my teeth with Preparation H haemorrhoid cream. It looked like toothpaste. My mouth didn't swell for a month!" ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST FIGHT YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN?

"We were on tour with Metallica in Bulgaria and I was eating breakfast in the hotel restaurant, and this group of partygoers across from me stuck me with their bill and left. I followed them into the street all indignant like, 'Pardon me, sir, how dare you' but they turned around and attacked me. I got into this enormous street brawl on a Sunday morning like a scene from *The Godfather*. I even threw a garbage can into their car window, but nobody called the cops." ✓

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU BLED?

"A couple of months ago when I ran into a deer on my bicycle. It ran in front of me and I hit its large rump and flew right off my bike. I came out way worse than the deer." ✓

WHAT'S THE RAREST PIECE OF MERCHANDISE YOU OWN?

"I've got loads of books and magazines from the 1930s, if that counts. My thing is collecting old stuff – it's like a time machine to me so I get a cool sense of history from it." ✗

WHAT'S YOUR MOST PAINFUL TATTOO OR PIERCING?

"I never got any tattoos or piercings because I didn't want to be part of a fad. I don't like to date-stamp myself. That's what my words are for. I'd rather express myself through my actions than draw on my skin." ✗

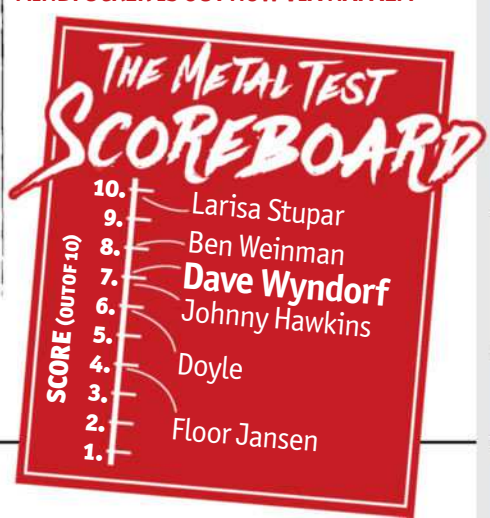
WHAT'S THE MOST METAL PHOTO ON YOUR PHONE?

"A good old picture of a nuclear bomb going off. I'm not a negative person so I don't know why but I've been drawn to that image my whole life. It's like a blooming flower of annihilation!" ✓

FINAL SCORE: 7/10

A respectable score from Dave, and we can't say we're too surprised. We'll pass on the ants though, thanks.

***MINDFUCKER* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM**



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